DANCE LEGACY OF

PATLIPUTRA

SHOVANA NARAYAN







PUBLICATIONS DIVISION

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SHOVANA NARAYAN

PUBLICATIONS DIVISION
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PREFACE

While glancing at the rich cultural and religious traditions and legacy in India, the eye automatically is struck by the immense political, cultural and philosophical contribution of the Indo-Gangetic belt especially from the pre-historic era to about the ninth or tenth century A.D. Even within these parameters of time, the contribution of the area presently known as Bihar is significant. Whether it was the war with Jarasandha during the period of the *Mahabharata* or the birth and development of Buddhism and Jainism or the prevalence of a democratically elected republic system of the Lichhivis known as the Vajji Sangh at Vaishali or the concept of an empire by Ajatshatru of Magadh, the inimitable contribution of the Mauryan era in terms of propagation of the message of non-violence, patronage to art and architecture, literature (which boasts of the famous *Arthashastra* of Kautilya) or the Golden Age of the Gupta period which saw the golden age of art, architecture, music and religious philosophy and the importance of Nalanda Universiy, attention was focused on the region of Bihar as the economic, cultural and political achievements saw great heights. During this vast period of thousand to fifteen hundred years, the great development and interest bestowed on music and dance along with women and male artistes are in direct contrast to the later day developments when Bihar took a backward step into the purdah of Indian cultural history.

What were the causes for the decline? But before that, what was the kind of art existing during the well known ancient period? Did these arts evaporate after the Gupta era or did it continue in small pockets of the State? If it did, then what was the form in which it developed and continued to grow? What is the geographical boundary of Bihar that we are talking about? Did women partake in the execution and rendering of dance through the ages or not? To answer these questions, the task of tracing the development of the dance form and the associated music was undertaken through not only a study of the available ancient literature, historical and religious material but also through a detailed study of the few terracotta and stone statues found in these areas as well as talking to the common man in Bihar.

With the cooperation of a number of local inhabitants, officials artistes, connoisseurs, musicologists, journalists, writers and even prostitutes, a lot of information was gleaned which has led to some intersting conclusions as to how the political developments in the State closely affected the development of music and dance in the region and as to why there was not a known 'gharana' system in Bihar in the field of dance in addition to the prevalence of Kathak and its associated story-telling dance forms. It also threw light on the various treatises written on the subject especially in the Mithila region of Bihar and the different varieties of costumes of the dancers. The study also seeks to identify a number of Kathak artistes in the region which has surpassed all expectations.

Knowledge of a pulsating dance and music tradition even under the sheet of ignorance, disinterest of the local population would have, perhaps, been possible had there been an emergence of a 'gharana' as it happened in the case of Lucknow, Jaipur or Benaras where it was essentially one family in each of these places which practised Kathak and influenced the thinking of all relating to the widespread prevalence of Kathak in these areas. Because a closer look at the social conditions of these two provinces of UP and Rajasthan reveal that they were not very different from that of Bihar.

As regards geographical boundary, what is to be kept in mind that it is fluid, changing with the fortunes of different dynasties. Therefore, the political boundary of today is vastly different from the political boundary during British India wherein the region upto Varanasi was also part of Bear (i.e. Bihar). It may be pertinent to mention that Patliputra appearing in the title of the book does not confine itself to Patna of today but covers the entire State of Bihar.

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

The history of Bihar is important in determining the nature of Indian history from fifth-sixth century BC onwards for it gave to India the first concept of not only an empire but also a united *Bharatvarsha* during the Mauryan period, the seeds of which were sown earlier by the Haryank rulers. It also gave to India the first democratic and administrative systems in addition to various religious movements such as Buddhism and Jainism and later, during the Gupta epoch, Hinduism, in the form that we know today. The *dharmashstras* and the *griha-sutras*, giving an ethical base to the social life of the people by orienting the precepts of Aryanism went hand-in-hand with Sanskritisation, replacing Pali i.e. Magadhan Prakrit, which formed the basis of the emotional integration of India.

The contours of spiritual, social, cultural and political ethos of the Mauryan period giving India, for the first time, a unique entity, came to be filled during the Gupta period. The spiritual revival culminating in 'mature Aryanism' or the Hinduism of today manifested itself in the images of brahminical gods being carved out in the temples that came to be built in their honour. In the field of culture, the Gupta period witnessed a maturity of the process. The incursions by the Macedonians in the pre-Mauryan period followed by contacts with the Greeks and the Scythians in the Mauryan and the post-Mauryan periods influenced the arts especially sculpture and literature of the day. On another plane, the Indian civilization absorbed the foreigners who settled here by absorbing them within the Hindu fold.

The temples of the Gupta period is a natural continuation of the 'chaityas', 'viharas' and cave temples that came into existence from the time of the Mauryas, mirroring the social and religious ethos prevailing during that period. Of the four ways in which Hinduism perceives God namely 'nirakar nirguna', 'nirakar saguna', 'sakar saguna and 'sakar nirguna', it is the 'sakar saguna' which has been exploited in dance. Rituals which enjoyed a prominent position in society involved music and dance. Thus, correctly, the Maurya and the Gupta periods, both with their capitals at Patliputra, are regarded as the twin peaks of Indian civilization.

Commenting upon the achievements of Ashoka the Great, historian Radha Kamal Mukerji says "not only did Emperor Asoka achieve the consolidation of a vast Indian empire based on a unified Indian culture, but he also spread the message of universal peace and concord to the independent Dravidian countries and to the Greek rulers of Asia".

It is believed that the Aryanisation of Bihar took roots largely through the efforts of Nabhnedisht, son of Manu at Vaishali and of Mathav Videgh at Mithila. While the political contributions of Bihar to Indian history is well-known, culturally, the contributions of the four principal areas of Bihar namely, Mithila, Anga, Vaishali and Magadh are noteworthy. Magadh was the centre of Vratya culture as seen in the fifteenth section of the *Atharva Veda*. Bihar was the greatest centre of learning in ancient India. The *gayatri mantra* had its birth in south Bihar while the *Yajur Veda* was the gift of Mithila. The *Kaushitki Upanishad* was written after achieving enlightenment by Maharshi Vishwamitra on the banks of river Kaushitki. Bihar boasted of great scholars such as Rishi Dirghitamas, his son Kakshivan and his granddaughter, Ghosha as also of scientists such as Aryabhatta.

The court of Raja Janak of Mithila was adorned by the well-known Sanskrit scholar, Yagyavalkya, author of *Shukla Yajur Veda* and the *Yagyavalkyasmriti*. Besides, there were many women scholars such as Gargi as is seen in the *Vrihadaranayakopnishad*. Maharshi Gautam, hailing from Mithila authored the *Nyayashastra* and some of the 'smritis', while his son, Shatanand, was the royal priest of Raja Janak. The author of *Sankhya Shastra*, Maharshi Kapil, also hailed from Mithila as did

Mandan Mishra, an authority on 'nyaya' and 'mimansa', the latter having authored many works such as *Vedantvartik, Vidhivivek, Brahmasiddhi. Mandan Trishati* to name a few. Similarly, Vimalkirti of Vaishali was not only a disciple of Lord Buddha but was also the author of *Vimalkirti Nidesh* which has been translated into Chinese.

Panini, the famous grammarian, was a student at Patliputra while the University of Nalanda had among its 10,000 students the renowned Chinese travellers and scholars Hiuen-Tsang, Fa-Hien and Itsing. Hiuen-Tsang was a student of Sheelbhadra while Itsing is credited with having prepared the Chinese-Sanskrit lexicon. Among its other students were Hiuen-chi, Tao-hi, Sin-chik, Chi-hing, Tang and Hui-lun who had taken on the Indian names of Prakashmati, Srideva, Charitraverma, Pragyadeva and Pragyaverma respectively. The Afghan scholar, Veeradeva, was also an alumni of Nalanda University.

Sariputra, disciple of Buddha and Maudgalyayan were also alumnis of Nalanda while some of the other reputed scholars of this University included Jinmitra, Sheeghrabuddha, Chandrapala, Sthirmati, Prabhakarmitra, Dharmapala, Bhadrasena, Gyangarbha, Shantirakshit and Pandit Padmasambhava. In his later years, Pandit Padmasambhava went to Tibet and taught the 'lama dharma'. Nalanda University's curriculum included fine arts inclusive of music and dance and the handicrafts along with learnings in social, religious and political texts. 'Ratnasagar', 'Ratnodadhi' and 'Ratnaranjak' were the three main libraries of the University.

Nalanda University set up sometime in the fifth century AD during the rule of the Guptas, seemed to have been functioning till the middle of the thirteenth century, having been rebuilt after the great fire in the tenth century, as is borne out by the writings of the Tibetan traveller, Dharmaswami, who came to Nalanda in 1236 AD. The eleventh or twelfth century saw the famous Mahayana Buddhism's 'shastra granth' *Ashtrasahastrikapragyaparmita,* copies of which found its way to Nepal, the Royal Asiatic Society of London and the Bodolin Library of Oxford. It is also believed that the Tibetan script owes its origin to the Magadhan script.

With the establishment of the Pala rule, Gopalpala made his capital at Udantpur (present day Biharsharif) where he established a centre of learning to which he invited scholars from Nalanda. Thereafter, in the ninth century, Dharmapala, son of Gopalpala, laid the foundations of the Vikramshila University situated between Sultanganj and Kahalgaon in Bhagalpur district. Ratnakar was appointed the first Chancellor of the University. During the rule of Dharmapala, Buddhagupta was the head while Dipankar Srigyan hailing from Anga was appointed Registrar of the University. Dipankar was the author of over fifty-five texts on 'darshanshastra' and over seventy texts on 'tantra' besides translating into Tibetan the various Buddhist texts. Shantibhadra and Sthirbhadra were two of the eminent scholars of this University.

With the spread of Muslim rule in various pockets of Bihar, even though Nalanda and Vikramshila Universities continued to function for quite some time, Mithila became the cultural and litterary centre as it provided the necessary haven to fleeing artistes and literateurs. The well-known Sanskrit writers such as Sridutt Upadhyaya, Harinath Upadhyaya, Bhaveshvarman, Indrapati, Lakshmipati, Vachaspati, Vardhman, Vibhakar, Bhanudutt, Umapati, Chandeshwar and Jyotirishwar are some of the well-known litterateurs of this region. Sridhardas was the author of *Saduktikarnamrit* while the political treatise *Rajniti Ratnakar* was written by Chandeshwar. Vidyapati was one of the renowned literary gems of this area.

Thus, the high levels of proficiency in literature and the importance given by the State to not only political and socio-religious aspects but also to fine arts and handicrafts, displayed a highly cultured and learned society and is borne out by the curriculum of the universities especially Nalanda which included music and dance as subjects.

Another significant pattern which emerges while following the social and political developments in the State is that bursts of immense cultural activities came to the fore during periods of political stability. As Bihar, especially Patliputra and before it Vaishali or Magadh and the Mithila region were the centres of power, cultural activity, hence dancers centred

around these areas. However, in the brief Kushan period, there was a slight shift of emphasis which again came to rest at Patliputra with the Golden Gupta period whose capital was once more located at Patliputra. In the subsequent middle ages when the seat of political power shifted away from Bihar, this region saw great political instability and there was a simultaneous decline in cultural activities.During the late medieval period, the 'subedari' of Bihar was in the hands of Muslim nawabs but the Deputy Governership was with the Hindus. Hence, court etiquette had Muslim influences while Hindu court culture was predominant in very few court pockets. This, perhaps, along with the adoption of the 'purdah' system by the society in full measure also explains the reticient attitude of the local populace towards art and culture.

It is, therefore, no wonder that not many artistes or dancers came to be known during the medieval and later periods. However, in localised areas, pockets of patronage survived such as in the Mithila region and later Bettiah, Gaya and Muzaffarpur. Even though the *shrenis* or organised guilds of artistes had emerged in the ancient period of Indian history, however, the migratory pattern of the artistes became even more noticeable during the medieval period, because artistes, for survival, went to those courts, temples or places where they received patronage. Not only did artistes flock to centres of patronage within Bihar but they also travelled far and wide taking with them the culture of the area from which they hailed. For example, Budhan Mishra migrated from Mithila to the court of Tripura sometime in the late fifteenth or early sixteenth century while Chandika Dubey from Gaya became the court musician in Tripura. In Nepal it is said that the well-known Nepali musicologist, Sinh Bhupal (fifteenth century) belonged to the Mithila royal clan. Some even believe that he was the Mithila ruler. Thus, the migratory pattern of the dancers stand out vividly and perhaps the absence of a 'gharana' system in Bihar could be attributed to this fact. At best, only two to three generations in very few cases were observed as the rest of the family members took to other professions for survival mainly due to little economic returns for the male dancers, making it difficult for them to support their families.

Secondly, the accepted 'gharanas' came about only around 1895 after a music and dance festival at Jaipur by which time most of the practising Kathaks in Bihar were descendants of the Kathaks of Rajasthan or Azamgarh, the latter being related to the Mishra family of the Lucknow gharana. Within Bihar itself, patronage bestowed by a few rulers were generally in favour of music traditions in which there was an emergence of indigenous 'gharana' systems.

The study of the practice of music, dance and theatre in the various regions of the entire Indian sub-continent led to the compilation of the monumental treatise, the *Natyashastra*. The study of the music and dance traditions of Anga and Videh formed part of the study of the *Natyashastra*.

In addition, because of the social structure, a curious phenomenon was observed. The system of the *panchpatiyas* was followed to quite some extent. In other words, the artiste had to be well versed in the five arts of singing, dancing, percussion, stringed or wind instrument and poetry writing. As far as vocal music was concerned, it was the *dhrupad ang* which was prevalent. The *khayal ang* of music lagged behind in popularity. Many instances have been quoted that when a *khayaliya* sang in the *dhrupad* style, the performance was hailed by one and all. However, the *khayal ang* managed to establish itself towards the end of the nineteenth century. On the percussion front, the *pakhawaj* had no parallel. Even today in quite a few villages, the *pakhawaj* called the *mridanga*, is used for music and dance besides the *dhol*. Tabla made its entry rather late. But what was peculiar about Bihar was that quite a few of the families developed into three branches consisting of singers, dancers or instrumentalists, each intermingling or changing streams at various points of time. So even if a family was traditionally known as vocalists yet certain members of the family made their mark as gifted percussionists while still others left their imprint in the field of Kathak.

Another senario which emerges is that as a result of the *purdah* system adopted by society, the ladies of the house did not appear in public to perform. Often it was the courtesans or *bhands* who entertained

both the men and the women. But the more discerning of the local rulers, noblemen or zamindars, while witnessing the highly developed and technically sound performances of some of the courtesans and *bhands* who had made their mark as dancers of great merit, also professed the desire to witness the performance of maestros as also the need to have good teachers for the courtesan dancers and the *bhands*. This interest led to an interesting turn of development as in quite a few cases it was found that Kathak performance replete with *abhinaya, tukaras, parans* were either taught or performed by skilled performers or maestros whose main occupation were as singers or instrumentalists or percussionists.

On the need to learn about the Kathak teacher for 'courtesan dancers', it may be necessary to quote our experience at Muzaffarpur. This region had in earlier times witnessed performances by Kathaks whose families had been associated with some nearby temples; but this is no longer to be seen. In times of yore, these dancers even though dubbed by the dubious name of 'tawaifs' yet had a strict code of conduct and were not of easy virtue for all and sundry as is popularly believed. They were well-versed in the arts as well as social etiquettes and nuances so much so that youngsters of respectable families were sent there for training in social manners and etiquette. Unable to understand the subtle difference, the writers of British India dubbed them as lowly prostitutes. Today however, near the Chaturbhujsthan is the Meena gali habited by prostitutes from where the information emanated that their teachers were usually the Kathaks. These Kathaks moved from place to place primarily teaching, sometimes to girls and boys of respectable families (as music and dance is now slowly becoming a fashion in some of the ordinary households) but more often, to the few courtesan dancers who are still interested in the classical art. The number of such prostitutes are extremely few as most of them, it was learnt, have shifted over to film music and dance.

While the tradition of teaching Kathak by the *panchpatiyas* having tabla, mridanga (pakhawaj) or vocal music as the main occupation may sound well in theory, in practice it led to another kind of problem. While it may have been a good indicator of all round development of an artiste

as well as an indicator to the interest of many families in music and dance within the strict limitation and social obligations imposed by society, it became necessary for the 'tabla' or 'mridanga vadaks' to teach the art of Kathak in such households (were they could not venture outside to learn in public). Unfortunately, the mastery over rhythmic patterns passed on by the 'tabla' and 'mridanga gurus' teaching Kathak created an atmosphere where the audience learnt to appreciate rhythmic intricacies only. This factor was most evident in the various classical music and dance conferences held at the time of Dussehra in various parts of Bihar and at various cross roads of Patna featuring top artistes of the country. (Sadly, this system of having whole night classical music and dance festivals is slowly dying out as film and ghazal evening have taken the place of classical music and dance evenings).

As far as the local students were concerned, it led to a system where dexterity in rhythm eschewed and overshadowed the much needed grace, clarity and beauty of *ang* in execution. The graceful performance and *bhav rasa pradhan* rendering of dance especially by the courtesan dancers of yore seem to be far remote from the renderings of artistes of this century. Perhaps realising the need for beauty in execution, a number of interested dancers and teachers learnt from great Kathak gurus who came to Bihar but others travelled to Lucknow, Calcutta, Benaras and Jaipur to learn from the Kathak maestros there so that the same could be transmitted to students at home. Today, as most of the Kathak maestros and famous dancers are concentrated in Delhi, there is a trend of the interested student dancers and future teachers from Bihar to come to Delhi in order to acquire the essence of dance and its associated beauty and grace so as to be able to transmit the same back in Bihar, a trend which is true for all interested students from different parts of the country.

CHAPTER 2

State of Music and Dance and the Status of Dancers

In the chequered political history of Bihar, the cultural development also took interesting turns. Beginning in the pre-Vedic period when as a means of self-expression, music and dance gained sway, self-expression towards wonder at the creation of the world by God to festive occasions such as births, marriages, good harvest to name a few, the prevalent tribes of the various regions of this land found its outlet through songs, ballads, paintings and enactment. Thus, even with Aryanisation of the region, certain pockets of original and displaced tribals existing in and around the Chhota Nagpur belt and Santhal Parganas still display the old culture and habits even while some of the other tribal deities were assimilated into the Vedic fold transcending all religious barriers. The new Vedic religion, Hinduism, consisted as any religion would have, of manual and verbal performances of rites and rituals. In doing so, besides expressing wonder and thanksgiving to the Almighty, music and dance became associated with a way of life where not only were they performed on special occasions but they also developed into highly rich art forms patronised by the connoisseurs and organised and choreographed by the 'vidwans' or the learned. Thus it laid the foundations for a living system of dance in the *margi* and the *desi* forms.

In the field of classical music and dance, any discussion is basically a reflection of the social habit and custom of a limited section of society. Even today in any part of the world, classical music and dance

performances have their own audience. The pre-occupation of the region in trying to ward off political invaders and the negative fall out of the strict caste and social hierarchy which spreads its roots like cancer and influences of the Bhakti movement came to be reflected in the various items, repertoires, texts of ballads and verses of songs and dances and in the depth of longing, pain, sorrow and romance in the *poorab* ang of the *thumris*.

Fine arts in Bihar of ancient India were considered to be paths to *moksha* (salvation) which has been beautifully expressed by Rishi Yagyavalkya of Bihar as -

"veenavadanattavagyah shrutijativisharadaha
talagyaschaprayase'n mokshmargam prayachhati"

(i.e. the practice of music and rhythm which pleases the ears are paths leading to salvation).

Dance began from simplistic presentations and went into pastures of individual skill and excellence as is borne out by the mention of dancers in Buddhist and Jain canons. According to a reference in the *Vishnupurana*, the lineage of the rulers of the Ikshvaku dynasty of Vaishali has been attributed to the son Vishal of an *apsara* by the name of Alambusha, proficient in the arts of music and dance. The Balmiki *Ramayana* also contain references to the prevalence of music and dance during the time of Raja Janak, father of Sita. The written accounts of Fahien, Hiuen Tsang and Itsing refer to the prevalence of music and dance in daily life and description of groups of 'courtesan dancers' associated with the nobility. From the various *Jataka* stories, Dheegnikay and the Therigatha and from Buddhist legends and *Vinay* texts such as the "Mahavagga", names of many accomplished dancers are found. Amrapali, Salvati, Padmavati and Vimla, are some of the names found in these texts. It also appears that many festive occasions featuring music and dance called 'samajjas' were held regularly during that period. Stray references in the text also reveal that while special dance occasions were organized by the connoisseurs, the dance sequences were choreographed by maestros. Amrapali and Salvati, two excellent dancers of their times and enjoying the status of *nagar badhus*, were supposedly nimble footed

and dexterous in display of footwork while embodying grace in body movements. According to the *Sri Kalpasutra* of Acharya Bhadrabahu and the Brihatkalpa, Kosha (also known as Ghosha) was a beautiful and famous 'dancer courtesan' who had been given the title of "Roop" and whose proficiency in dance was exemplified by the fact that she won the admiration of one and all who beheld her graceful performance replete with footwork while dancing on the tip of a needle. Mention has also been made of another dancer called Upkosha. The accounts of Megasthenes, the Greek Ambassador to the court of Chandragupta Maurya in India also dwells on the dances for rituals and on the fact that the temples and palaces were built with attached dance halls where the singers and dancers performed.

Though there was a clear demarcation between the classical and the folk, yet even amongst the classical sphere, the presentations took the forms of religious as well as court presentations both being intertwined and with very blurred boundaries so it was possible for one to transcend to the other. It also laid the foundations for the systems of *nagar badhus* where the title was bestowed annually on the outstanding dancer of the time. The *nagar badhus* while being described as 'courtesan dancers' supposedly enjoyed status in society as they were beyond the reach of the common man and were artistes of high order. They also enjoyed not only royal patronage but supposedly also equal respect as though belonging to the royal clan. Adorned with this title were the well-known dancers Amrapali, Salvati, Vimla to name a few (Amrapali has also been called Ambapali as she, as a baby, had been found under a mango tree).

However, the practice of dance and its related environment was closely intertwined with social and religious activities. The practice of temple building began with the Gupta period when Hinduism in its present form came to be practised. With this started the rituals of entertaining the Gods which, in turn, gave birth to the system of 'devadasis'.

The name of devadasi Satunuka appearing on the inscription of the mural painting of eighth century A.D. discovered near Nalanda indicates

the existence' of the system of temple dancing girls. These systems, however, degenerated in the medieval period when 'courtesan dancers' and 'devadasis' did not enjoy the same 'alleged' respect, position and patronage in society, but what is interesting is the fact that often her teacher was a Kathak whose family may have been associated with a temple at some point of time.

In the ancient period, references to dancers and actors in the court of Raja Janak and later the *nagar badhus* of the Mauryan period testify to the existence of skilled dancers as well as 'gurus'. Similarly, the Gupta period saw the redaction of the *Puranas* and the incorporation of the various religious myths and text in dance enactments. In the early medieval period, the music treatise written by Nanyadev (eleventh century A.D.) called the *Saraswati Hridayalankar* popularly known as the *Bharat bhashya* throws light on the various ragas in usage and how music influenced the delineation of expression. To quote...

"kiyanto niyata ragalyeshu pratipadita rasanuradhadanyepi
ragah karya maneeshibhi"

(i.e. the medium tempo should be used for the moods of mirth and love. slow tempo for the mood of sadness and extremely fast tempo for displaying moods of valour, anger, wonder, disgust and fear.)

The hand gestures utilised in the dance prevailing at that time have been described in the treatise *Sri Hastamuktavali* written by the Mithila ruler, Maharaja Shubhankar (1516-1607) of the Kharaoire dynasty. The *Varna Ratnakar*, a treatise by Jyotishwar Thakur describes thirty types of poses and *mudras* indicative of prevalence of dance and twenty kinds of 'veenas' and 'mridangas' used by musicians - dancers of the fourteenth century while the *Ragatarangini* written in the late sixteenth, but most likely the seventeenth century, in the court of the then Mithila ruler describes the rendering into dance of Vidyapati's poems and verses by Jayath, a well known artiste of his time. In another reference in the *Ragataranini*, a description of an episode indicates the existence of "Sumati Kathak" group. This group owes its name to the *brahmin vidwan* (learned man) who enacted out stories from the *Puranas* to Raja

Sumati born in the kayastha community. Since then the enacter narrator came to be known as the Sumati Kathak. Jayath, son of Uday and grandson of Sumati carried on the tradition of Kathaks.

The various schools of music and dance include the *'maheshvani'*, the *'lagni'*, *'samadaun'*, *'batmani'*, *'kohbar'*, *'jatsar'*, *'jhoomar'*, *'poorab ang'* of thumri' which saw its flowering in the abhinaya delineations of the 'Kathakas' of the region, the *'Gaya school'* of music, the *'Rivilganj parampara'* (tradition) of *'mridanga'* or *'pakhawaj'*, the *'Darbhanga gayaki'* of *'Dhrupad'*, the *'kheliran'* of Gaya and the *'bidesia'* of Bihari Thakur. In addition, there is the *'Nathpanthi'* sung by the Gorakhpanthi sadhus who have been carrying on a musical tradition enunciated in the *Mrigavati* of Sufi poet, Sheikh Kutban. In this work, mention has been made of the 'Bharat pingal' and the utilisation of instruments such as the *'kingari'* and the *'been'*. The fourteenth century also saw the prevalence of *'som gayan'* from Maner popularised by the Sufi saint, Sadirfun Ahmad Maneri. Other popular forms in the State are the *'harnam jogida'*, *'suthre sain'*, *'allaha biraha'* and the dances of the *'bais'*, *'rumzanis'*, *'bhaktiyas'*, *'nrityakalis'*, *'dharimirasin'*, *'pavangriya'*, *'jhumariya'* and the *'kalavangti'*.

On the literary front, one of the earliest information on the prevalence of dance (Kathak) in modern Bihar comes from Buchanan's survey which will be discussed in the following chapter, by which it is evident that there was a living culture of Kathak in the region.

Status of Dancers

Women of ancient period Bihar seem to have contributed more to the enlightened atmosphere as compared to later day contributions. The *Vrihadaranyakopnishad* describes an assembly of statesmen called by Raja Janak of Mithila from various parts of India including Kuru and Panchal. This assembly also witnessed the presence of Gargi and the well known discussion on 'shastras' between Rishi Yagyavalkya and Gargi. The institution of 'swayamvara' where the women chose their husbands seems to have been prevalent in ancient Bihar. The ninth century saw the famous discussion on the 'shastras' between Sharada Devi, wife of Mandan Mishra with Shankaracharya in which the latter ceded to her. At this point of time, society saw the ladies of ordinary household well versed

in Sanskrit which is reflected in the encounter of Shankaracharya with a woman drawing water from a well and to whom he asked for directions to the house of Mandan Mishra. The lady replied in Sanskrit.

"jagaddhru vansyajagaddhruvam va keerangana yatra giro giranti,

dwarastha needanansannirudho janohi tan Mandanmishra dham."

(i.e. Straight across the forest of fig (pipal) trees, at the foot of the hill where the parrots abode, is the dwelling of Mandana Mishra).

From a reference in the *Deeghnikaya* it appears that the wife of Prasenajit defeated the 'kathakad pandit proshthapad' in the regular mehfils of 'katha'.

But while talking of music and dance, what emerges foremost in the minds is the abundance of women dance practitioners and male gurus, apart from some of the hereditary family of male dancers. Thus the question of the status of dancers needs to be discussed. Broadly speaking, the history of dance in various parts of India saw similar graphs of highs and lows with the dancers being given theoretically exalted position in ancient times which saw its low during the medieval period when courtesans or temple dancers (who were more often the sexually exploited ones) were outside the limit of respected society and which again saw another upward swing with the new mood of the twentieth century when the taboo on women of good families taking to dance was removed.

In a sequence referred to in the *Vinaypataka* where the 'rajahs' (kings or princes) were required to go with their wives, of the twenty-nine princes, one took his beloved, a dancer courtesan, as part of the royal entourage, an act which seems to have been apparantly acceptable in society. In another reference in the *Khantivadi Jatak*, it appears that Raja Kalabu was always accompanied by a dancer. But the test of acceptance of society is reflected in the treatment meted out to the children of such courtesan dancers. From the vantage point of the twentieth centry, daughters of such dancer courtesans follow their mothers' footsteps and the sons take to related jobs, with the clear message that they are not accepted within the mainstream of society. In ancient Bihar, the

democratic region of Vaishali has a different story to tell. According to the *Vishnupurana*, Vishal, the son of dancer Alambusha, succeeded to the throne of Vaishali. Also Shishunag who suceeded the Haryank clan to the throne of Magadh, was the son of a Lichhivi dancer. According to the *Terigatha*, Abhay, son of dancer Padamavati and Bimbisara, became a Buddhist monk. However, all this changed with the sway of Brahminical society.

The reference to the *'vidwans'* associated with the organisation and choreography of the items danced by the courtesans or 'devadasis' is clearly a reflection on the male dance 'gurus'. The system of not only the 'courtesan dancers' but also of male dance 'gurus' are also to be seen in the succeeding ages especially in the last two centuries. What died out seems to be the system of 'devadasis' for nowhere do we find mention of any 'Satunuka' of the succeeding ages. This is not surprising as the phase of temple building activity ceased in the Gangetic belt with the growing onslaught of muslim domination and with it the ritual of temple dancers also died a natural death.

CHAPTER 3

Sources indicating the Form of Dance

Clearly, dance and music had occupied an important place in the cultural history of Bihar. The question now arises as to whether the style of dance practised in the region could be compartmentalised within the well known parameters of classical and folk dances, as we know them today. As is well-known, in the attempt to trace the history of various dance forms, heavy emphasis has been placed on the stances depicted on temple sculptured panels. While studying the sculptures, it may be argued that some of the postures may be applicable to all dance forms. Accepting this point of view, it becomes imperative to see that whether the stances of the dancers or the 'yaksha-yakshis' in the various statues and sculptures provide a continuity to the dance form prevalent in the region and study its main hallmarks. In order to relate the sculpture's poses and stances to a particular dance form, the historical thread of continuity through which a sculpture evolves into, perhaps, a more complex form in a particular region, has to be taken into consideration. It is in this thread of continuous evolution that a practising dance form of a region should be contextualised reflecting the ethos of the sculptural traditions of the area. Barring Kathak, most of the classical dance forms did not sport today's familiar names even as late as the early part of this century. Thus, even while studying the form of the dance form prevalent in Bihar, the tools for identification available to us are :

(a) Study of the position, poses, stances and attitudes adopted by the "natis", "yakshas", "yakshinis" and "salbhanjikas" in the sculptured panels and terracotta statues excavated from the region;

(b) study of literary works indicating references to dancers or dance forms and social conditions prevalent during that period; and

(c) study of paintings of later medieval and modern period of Indian history pertaining to Bihar.

Taking the collateral evidence one by one, a pattern indicating a sustained interest in music and dance emerges through—

- story-telling tradition,
- the stance exhibited by dancers over the ages,
- caste hierarchy of the dancers especially the male dancers.

At the outset, the essential features of Kathak needs to be discussed:

1) Deriving its name from 'katha' and 'kathakar', it is indicative of a story-telling tradition involving highly developed hand and body movements and mime for successful delineation.

2) In the course of delineation, the treatment of the body is in a near vertical stance with no exaggerated distortion of the torso and hips except for naturalistic curves identifiable as the 'tribhangi' or the 'ardhamandali'.

3) The combination of arm, feet and hand movements i.e. 'karanas' are again naturalistic in the 'nritta' portions making excessive usage of the 'pataka', 'samdamsa', 'hansapaksha', 'sarpashirsha', 'arala', 'candrakala hastakas' etc. whereas the entire gamut of the 'asamyukta' and the 'samyukta hastas' are utilised in the 'abhinaya' sequences.

4) The rendering of expressions in the 'abhinaya' tends towards naturalism with emphasis on the subtle uses of all minor limbs.

5) The naturalistic stance of Kathak gives ample occasion to the display of rhythmic virtuosity in the 'nritta' segments such as intricate footwork and pirouettes especially the 'cakra bhramari' classification.

Literary sources and prevalent cultural traditions

In the various references of works especially of the medieval and early

modern period of Indian history, including the surveys of F.Buchanan, it is noticed that the skilled and technically developed dance form identified with the Kathak tradition are all based on the story-telling tradition.

Francis Buchanan's *Survey of Bihar* (1807-1814) Report 58 kathak establishments in the principal towns of the area. The estimate of the number of dancers in the district of Purnea in 1809-1810 are classified under the categories of 'bai' or dancing girls (57), 'bhaktiya' (6), 'nrityakali' (27). 'Bais' were the women who danced and sang to musical accompaniment. These 'bais' were known as Gajoch in the Mithila region. Buchanan states that the "bais" or "Gajoch" were usually followers of the *Qoran* faith. 'Bhaktiyas' were the dancing boys who enacted out mythological tales around the temple areas. 'Nrityakalis' were young boys who dressed up as Goddess Parvati or Radha and enacted out Shiva Parvati or Radah Krishna themes. They were usually accompanied by four or five men beating the cymbals while an artiste gave rhythmic accompaniment on the 'mridanga'. This practice was prevalent in the north-west part of the district. In the western part of the district, boys from the weaver clan called 'jola' ('julahas') sang and danced to the 'ashtapadis' of *Geet Govinda*. The 'Kaliadamaniya' was a rude kind of opera popular in these areas. All these dance varieties reflected the influence of Kathak and its grammar.

Francis Buchanan's Survey of the Bhagalpur district in 1810 describes various types of dancing girls namely the 'mirasins', 'bai', 'rumzani', 'khelani', 'domni' and the 'nariyal'. According to him, 'mirasins' were "dancing girls" performing before Muhammedan women of rank. They were constrained to performing in the 'Rajmahal' (Palace) where two sets of five dancing girls each were maintained. "Bais" were the common dancing girls professing faith in the *Qoran*. The 'rumzanis' were considered to be the best dancers in the district. The 'khelanis', 'domnis and the 'nariyals' danced on special occasions such as births, marriages, festivals etc. Among the dancing boys, Buchanan mentions the 'jhumariyas' who danced out the Radha-Krishna sequences in the Kathak idiom that was reminiscent of the Raslila.

A survey of the district of Patna in 1811-12 describes several dancing sects, most of whom again professed faith in the Qoran. Some also belonged to the Brahmin faith. These were the 120 families of 'dharimirasins', 80 houses of 'pavangriyas' and 70 families of 'kalavangtis'. Buchanan's account of the district of Shahabad in 1812-13 mentions 6 families of 'dharimirasins', 63 families of 'pavangriyas' and 10 families of 'kalavangti'. The 'dharimirasins' were the dance and music girls while the 'pavangriyas' performed on festive occasions. The 'kalavangtis' were ballad singers of the Kathak kind who originally were from the Brahmin community. According to the survey, 'Kathaks' were musician dancers of the sacred order who were however excluded from performing the communion. Dancing boys or 'bhaktiyas' have also been mentioned in the survey.

The various dance forms prevalent in the region such as the 'lavni', the 'nachari', the 'jhumariya', the 'harnam jogida', 'kheliran', 'suthre sain', 'allaha-biraha', the dance of the 'mahatos' and the 'manjhhis' as well as the 'kathakas' indicate a common pattern of rhythmic body movements, the way of holding the body and enactment of a given text. The text, however, differs according to the style of the particular dance form. While one may dwell on a mythological story, another may dwell on the atrocities of the local 'zamindar' or still another may enact out the verses of a religious text or of that of a poet saint. But what is striking is the posture of the body and feet movement adopted by these various forms. All treat the body in the 'samabhanga' position i.e. the vertical stance with the dynamic movements dissolving in quick successions to 'abhanga' or 'dwibhanga' and then to the 'tribhanga' positions before returning to the 'samabhanga' once again. The 'mandalas' employed within most of the dance forms (with the exception of Chhau) again are natural and life-like with no exaggerated use of the 'ardhamandali' (or the half sitting position) as the basic posture. During interpretations, the hand gestures employed are also natural while following the broad classification of the Natyashastra system. In almost all the dance forms, enactment of the text is punctuated by bursts of rhythmic patterns where there is a prominent display of footwork, spinning arms and legs and pirouettes.

The 'lavni' from the Magadh area is a form where two or three singers sing and dance out mythological stories as well as stories on the atrocities committed on the poor innocent folk by the powerful. The instruments accompanying the dancers who dance in open spaces in the village are the 'chhang'., 'duff', 'kanjari' and the 'ektara'. Mention of the 'lavni' has been made by Bhartendu in his works. The 'harnam' and 'jogira' wherein two singer dancers enact out the verses in a dialogue form, usually end with the phrase "harnam sumirto kyon na". While the 'lavni' seems to have come into vogue about the end of the seventeenth century or the beginning of the eighteenth centry, the 'harnam' and 'jogira' are associated with the Bhakti movement. The 'jhumariya' tradition also began during the Bhakti movement when young boys before reaching the age of puberty enacted out sequences from the life of Radha and Krishna taking Kathak form as its base. Similarly, the 'nachari' based itself on the verses of Vidyapati.

In the 'chaiti', the body smeared with 'ramras' and wearing a yellow attire topped by a sparkling cap, the dancers danced merrily while their hands struck the 'kartal' in fascinating rhythms. Other specialised groups of dancers enacted out the slaying of Jatayu, Bali, as well as the 'shakti' prayer of Ravana which included brilliant improvisations of enactment. In the 'allaha biraha', two artistes facing each other, sang and enacted out stories of valour while their hands struck the 'dhol'. During these enactments, the artistes danced and pirouetted while maintaining incredible rhythms on the "dhol". Performed by women, the 'kheliran' is prevalent in the region in and around Gaya. The 'kirtaniya' and the 'vidyapat' forms of Mithila and Purnea are performed by men alone while the 'geetinatya' such as the 'salhes' are performed by performers belonging to the Dusadh caste. Similarly, the fishermen of Mithila region perform the 'kamala' while the 'jijya' is performed by women. The samachakaiva' is performed to celebrate the brother sister festival.

In some of the forms such as the 'suthre sain', the stick in the hand beat a staccatto beat on the iron bangles covering the entire arm of the performers. And of course, there were the 'kathakiya' who enacted and sang out mythological tales. Mention of the 'kushilavs' in the court of Raja

Janak and of the Sumati group of Kathak in the sixteenth and seventeenth century and the writings of Buchanan bear testimony to the long Kathak tradition in the area of Bihar. However, this seemed to be a fast dwindling group especially during the later part of the last century and the early part of this century, mainly due to economic factors and the absence of strong patronage with just a few remaining at the beginning of this century. This century also saw the arrival of a number of Kathak artistes from various parts of India especially Benaras and Rajasthan which contributed to the development of Kathak as we know it today. Also, many local artistes went to Lucknow and Rampur to receive higher training in Kathak from the known Kathak maestros. (Details of such families and dancers are discussed in a separate chapter).

An elucidation of all these forms falling into the classical, folk and semi-folk classifications are necessary as they all incorporate many elements of Kathak in their delineation which are most evident in the usage of hand gestures, the body stances, eye glances and feet movements. It is for this reason that Chhau dance form has been excluded from the purview of discussion as the body stances and 'mandali' or postures adopted by it fall in a category of its own. The Chhau limits itself to the Santhal Parganas and the Chhota Nagpur belt.

Sculptural Sources

In the annals of Indian history, archeological evidence seems to be absent between the discovery of Mohenjodaro and Harappan ruins with the well known figure of the dancing girl till the Mauryan era even though the small kingdoms of Vaishali, Magadh and Videh did exist prior to the Buddhist era and the Mauryan era as is evident from collateral sources of the various *Puranas*. The sculptural figure of Ajatsatru who died in 525 BC is to be seen in the Mathura museum. However, it was only from the time of Chandragupta Maurya onwards which saw great heights during Ashoka's rule in the Mauryan epoch, that architecture and sculptures were given great importance. This was commented upon by Megasthenes. During the period of Asoka, there was a great activity in sculptural and architectural achievements. He commissioned the building of many edicts and stupas. These achievements have been mentioned by the Chinese

traveller Fa Hien. The sculptures of Barabar caves and the carved railings at the temple of Bodh Gaya as well as the Yakshi of Didarganj are beautiful pieces of art.

The Jogimara caves at Ramgarh hills of third or second century B.C. supports an inscription describing the love between Devadinna, a sculptor and Satunuka, a 'devadasi' (dancer). The adjacent cave of Sitabenga has a whole theatre including a performing area and tiered seats.

The Gupta period (320-600 AD approximately) also saw great heights in the field of culture, art and architecture where the rulers were not only great patrons of the arts but were also great artistes themselves. Samudragupta was an accomplished veena player which was also displayed on the coins of the period. Many terracotta statues and statuettes have been excavated and quite a few have been found when washed ashore by the receding waters of the swollen Ganges. A study of these sculptures, panels and figures available in the various museums and on the ruins of Nalanda and the ruins of some temples reveal a number of interesting facts.

To see the stances utilised by the dancers of the area, an analysis of the stance of the dancers in the statues and paintings needs to be done. So far, the earliest dancing statues found in Bihar pertain to the third century BC. This will be studied in chronological order:

1) 'Laughing Nati' of Patliputra (3rd BC) : This terracotta statue belonging to the (Mauryan period) was discovered by Mr. Jackson, Principal of Patna College, in 1912 at Patna. The dancer is in a state of pirouette as is evident from the flared state of her frock. The position of the arms and feet are reminiscent of a 'chakkar' (pirouette) in Kathak. The basic stance is vertical.

2) Nati, Patliputra (Mauryan, 3rd BC) : The stance of the dancer is a vertical one with one arm resting on the hips and the second arm hanging down.

3) Nati, Patliputra (Mauryan, 3rd. BC.): Here again the stance and the hand and arm positions of the dancer is similar to the one described at No.2 above .



CHAITI



SUTHRE SAIN



Fig. 1



Fig. 2



Fig. 3



Fig. 4



Fig. 5



Fig. 6



Fig. 7



Fig. 8



Fig. 9



Fig. a



Fig. b

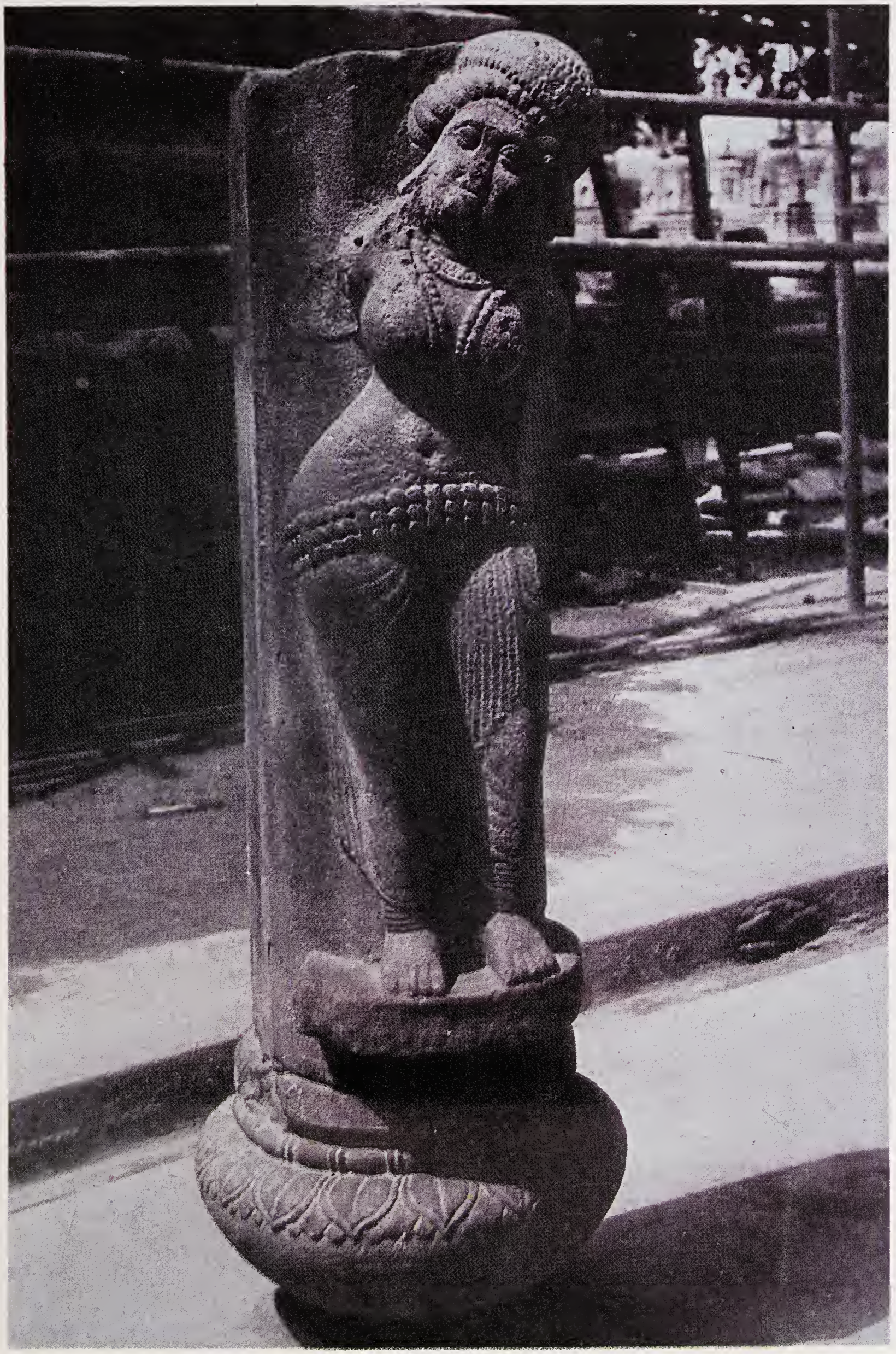


Fig. c



Fig. d



Fig. e



Fig. f



Fig. g



Fig. h



Fig. i



Fig. j



Fig. k



Fig. 1

4) Nati, Patliputra (Mauryan) : The artiste is standing in a vertical position with the right arm holding a 'damaru' near the shoulder.

5) Steatite plate: A study of a unique steatite plaque exhumed in 1962 from Rajgir in the Nalanda district shows dance postures by a lady. This area was associated with rulers of Magadh as well as with Buddhism. The plaque having a raised border has three compartments. While the top register shows a man wearing a dhoti with a belt and playing the harp, the lady is distinctly in a dance posture with the right hand raised and the left hand held downwards perhaps denoting the 'uttarkarana' and the 'adhomukha' respectively. In the third and lower most panel, the hands are stretched not unlike the ones found at Lauriya Nandangarh. The body is in the natural vertical position and the three registers of the plaque also reflect the association of wine, music and dance associated with goddesses and reflective of social life and custom. This is also the view of Dr. Satish Chandra Kala which is reflected in an article in the Sanskriti Sangam.

6) Sword dancer, Nalanda (Gupta) : It is the sitting down and getting up movement while holding a sword aloft in the hand. It is a posture akin to the 'dandiya raas' movement.

7) Dance scene, Nalanda (Gupta): The male dancer at the centre is holding a vertical stance. The right foot is in full contact with the earth and the left foot is about to strike the ground while the right hastaka is in the 'candrakala' movement.

8) Dance scene, Bodh Gaya railing (Gupta): The dancer is seen in a forword movement but turning towords the back and maintaining a natural stance.

9) Dancer, Nalanda (Gupta) : Owing to the crossed leg position, with the front feet carrying the weight, the stance has a slight naturalistic 'tribhangi' (and not an exaggerated one). One arm is stretched upwards with the second holding a 'pataka' hasta.

At the same time, it is necessary to study the sculpture of the various 'yakshis', 'yakshas' and 'salabhanjikas' to get a fair idea of the approach to dance and body stances.

a) Didarganj yakshi, Patna (3rd. BC): The yakshi is standing with the weight balanced equally on both the feet. The stance is, therefore, extremely natural. (The wrap around the waist has pleats in front but goes continuously around the ankles at the back without being tucked at the waist, an indicator to the 'vikachchha' kind of drape).

b) Salabhanjika, Patna (2nd BC): Here too, the 'salabhanjika' is standing naturally with the left foot supporting the weight, the left arm holding a branch over the head and the right arm resting casually on the hips.

c) Bodh Gaya (Gupta): The stance is a near vertical one. One hand is broken but the other is hanging down in a very natural way.

d) Bodh Gaya railing (Gupta); Both the 'yaksha' and 'yakshi' are in a standing position with one arm encircling the other and the second arm resting at the hip.

e) Both Gaya (Gupta): The figure is in a near vertical stance with right leg supporting the weight. (The long skirt is clearly of the 'vikachchha' variety).

f) Ranchi (6th AD.): The lady is in a standing position with the right leg supporting the weight and the arms hanging down very naturally.

g) Parvati, Bhabua (6th AD): Here, too, Parvati is seen standing rather naturally with the arms hanging down.

h) Aparajita, Gaya (8th AD): The 'devi' is seen in a forward moving position with the left arm near the breast and the right above the head.

i) Tara, Monghyr (10th AD): Tara is standing with the right foot supporting her weight.

j) Gaya (10th AD): While the 'devata' is seen standing with right foot supporting his weight and his right arm raised above the head, the 'devi' is seen standing with the left foot supporting her weight and both hands joined together at the front below the waist. The stances of the 'devata' and the 'devi' are extremely natural.

k) Kamdeva, Gaya (10th AD): Kamdeva is in a dynamic forward moving position with no exaggerated bends.

l) Vishnu, Chhapra (11th AD): The figure is standing rather naturally.

The terracotta figurines of 'nats' and 'natis' found at Buxar, Vaishali, Patliputra and those belonging to the Mauryan and Gupta periods (325-185 BC and 319 -650 AD) respectively were also studied and it was seen that the stances adopted by all the figures maintained a vertical position with no exaggerated distortion of the hips. Hence, the body showed a smooth flowing natural line. In quite a few of these sculptural representations, one of the hands was raised above the head and the other hung downwards. The treatment of the hand positions was again extremely natural including the 'hastakas' denoted in them. Most of the 'hastakas' utilised were the 'pataka', 'adhomukha', 'samdamsa', 'hansapaksha'. All these taken together indicate towords the form of Kathak. These statues and statuettes also reveal a continuity in the form and stance mirroring the prevailing dance situation of the time. Only the figure of the dancing Kartikeya of the sixth century found at Gaya displays the 'tribhangi' but at the same time it shows a moment of dynamism as though the dancer was caught in motion. With the exception of the dancing Kartikeya, no other figures found before or after the sixth century AD display exaggerated 'tribhangi' or the 'ardhamandali', supporting the argument of "the imagination of the sculptor of a dynamic movement of the dancing Kartikeya being frozen in time."

Some of the recesses in the ruins of Nalanda also show dancing figures in poses not unsimilar to the ones used by Kathaks. These have been elucidated earlier. According to modern historians, Nalanda was built sometime in the fifth century AD but according to Tibetan records it is believed to have been built around the second century AD. But whatever be the date of establishment of Nalanda, more important is the fact that the curriculum at Nalanda University included music and dance as subjects.

As far as some of the statues of the 'natis' of third century BC are concerned, some archaeologists are of the view that there might be some connection with Greece as some of them tend to trace Greek features in these dancers. But what emerges is the fact that there must have been great interaction between these dancers and the Kathaks as is borne out by the stances and tne costume of over 2300 years ago.

Painting sources

The medium of sculpture was not encouraged during the medieval period as any hint of iconography did not blend with the concept of the Islamic faith. In fact, the system of frescoes were also known during the Islamic period. In the 'Meghdoot' of Kalidasa, ' Yaksha' requests for a portrait of his beloved. In Bhavabhuti's "Uttarramcharita," the stories of the Ramayan being said through paintings have been mentioned. The Mithila paintings also provide coutinuity to the art form. From the Pala period (8th to the 12th century AD) spreading into Bengal but with the seat of power located in Bihar, there are some evidences of mural paintings in Bihar which were discovered in the excavated remains at Nalanda from its Serai mound. Among the figures identifed is that of a lady in a dancing pose, wearing a close fitting bodice. The stance of the dancer is in the near vertical position.

The interest towards art and the prevalence of dance in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in Bihar is also reflected in the few available paintings and etchings of this peried.

The art of painting was highly mature in Patna and one of the frequently treated subject was dance. From 1760 onwards, the Kayastha artists from Murshidabad moved to Patna. The paintings of Sewak Ram (1770-1830) depicted various dancing girls thereby portraying Indian occupation of the kind that generally appealed to the British. The Patna School of paintings (the Patna Qalamers) shows a clear departure from ordinary Mughal usage viz. illustration of literature as depiction of court life. The paintings of Hulas Lal (1785 - 1875) again depict groups of dancing girls not unlike those of Sewak Ram . A water colour painting

by Shiv Lal (1817 - 1877) shows a gentleman being entertained by dancing girls. This was apparently painted by him in 1860 which now hangs in the Victoria and Albert Museum (I.S.201, 1949). Painting on mica of lady musicians attributed to Shiv Dayal Lal (1820 - 1880) was done by him in 1865 approximately. It also hangs in the Victoria and Albert Museum (I.S. 4658). One of the assistants of Shiv Dayal Lal by the name of Jamuna Prasad (1859 -84) has painted dancing girls wearing pink and blue blouses.

'Yadagar-e-Rozgar', an Urdu work by Syed Badrul Hasan, Senior Honorary Magistrate at the Patna City Court, describes Patna at the turn of the century. This work contains sketches of famous courtesans of Patna who were experts in the field of music and dance. Some of these courtesan dancers became the subject of painters of the Patna Qalam. Interestingly, the poses adopted by the dancers, as depicted in these paintings, were extre nely natural holding a vertical stance. This is not surprising as they had been initiated into the art of Kathak.

Hand-gestures

Most of the handgestures of the 'nata-natis' and the 'Yaksha - Yakshinis' described in the preceding paragraphs range from the 'pataka', 'hansapaksha', 'arala' and the 'sarpasirsa'.

The Sri Hastamuktavali of Shubhankar written Mithila sometime in the 16th century, an evidence of a living dance tradition of the area, has classified 30 single hand gestures, 14 combined hand gestures and 27 dance gestures, thus enlarging the scope of gestures as given in the earlier works, viz. Natyashastra, Abhinaya Darpan, Sangeet Ratnakar etc. While also courageously differing with some points of view expressed in the Natyashastra. But much more revealing is the fact that the Sri Hastamuktavali gives far more number of applications of the 'hastas' as compared to the Natyashastra or the Abhinaya Darpan. For example, over 200 applications of 'pataka hastas' are enumerated in the Sri Hastamuktavali as against 30, 41 and 21 of the Natyashastaras, Abhinaya Darpan and Sangeet Ratnakar respectively. Similar is the scenario in respect of other 'hastas'. From a Kathak's point of view, what is



Women carousing, Hulas Lal (c 1840)

Dancing girls, Shiv Lal, Patna (c. 1860)



Dancing girls. Bihar Amateur Lithographic Scrap book. 1828



Lady Musicians, Painting on mica, Shiv Dayal Lal, Patna, 1865

important is that though some portions of the applications detailed in the Natyashastra and Abhinaya Darpan are applicable to all classical dance forms of India, yet in the extended application of the 'hastas' as detailed in the Sri Hastamuktavali, there are many such applications which find a direct applicability in Kathak.

'nitambadhyakachhe tu manibandhcalo karo
mardalprahato syatam shubhankarasamirito'

(i.e. the patakas wringing at the wrists while placed on the sides of the buttocks indicate playing of drums. This is a movement associated in the popular rendering of "dhitam dhitam daga daga thun taka tho").

'vastravgunthnadeva tathabhisararena ca'
abhisarika vinirdeshya vamenaiya karena tu'

(i.e. the left hand pataka draws up the veil while the other pataka moves forward representing a trysting woman. This is a movement often used as one of the veils of a trysting woman in Kathak).

Similarly, in the 'kartarimukha hasta', Sri Hastamuktavali describes the 'kartari hasta' moving obliquely near the eye as bashfulness through a veil, a movement not unfamiliar in Kathak as also the bringing down of a trembling 'kartarimukha' or a trembling 'ardhasuci' to denote the rain of Sravana (verses 255, 258 and 437 of Sri Hastamuktavali).

While the 'garuda hasta' is universally used in all Indian classical dance forms including Kathak to depict the bird, yet the application as given in verse 264 of the Sri Hastamuktavali is utilised by most of the Kathaks wherein a wagging 'kartari' is utlised to denote a flying bird.

"uddiye pakshivadyati kartari sa khage mata"

(i.e. the flying bird is denoted by a 'wagging kartari")

Similarly, a creeper is shown by a Kathak with rotating 'kartari hasta' being raised, which also finds mention in verse 266 of the Sri Hastamuktavali.

"nidhao puro tambita syat nikunje shikhayoryuto"

(i.e. "if the tips of finger of two kartaris are put together and the two hands are raised, it is a "creeper house").

The 'bhramara hasta' in Sri Hastamuktavali differs from that of the Natyashastra, Abhinaya Darpan and Sangeet Ratnakar. While in these three treatises, the forefinger is bent and the thumb and the middle finger are joined, the Sri Hastamuktavali describes the 'bhramara hasta' where only the middle finger and the thumb are joined, while the others are held up separately. A trembling 'bhramara hasta' thus is used to indicate a bee. This hasta of the Sri Hastamuktavali (verse 669) widely used by most of the Kathaks in preference to the 'bhramara hasta' of the Natyashastra.

"agre calanmadhukaro-leelaya kampitakritih"

(i.e. "if bhramara is moved at the front with grace and trembling, it is a black bee")

Thus, there are many such examples relating to the other 'hastas' of the Sri Hastamuktavali where in a direct and clear application within Kathak can be seen.

(A doubt has been expressed by some authors and art-historians as to the fact whether Shubhankar was the Mithila king or just Shubhankar kavi, the poet. Palm leaf manuscripts of the treatise have been found in Assam in its Assamese version, in Nepal in its Bengali version and in Oxford in its Assamese-Bengali version. Discovery of manuscripts, whether complete or incomplete, in different languages is not surprising as Mithila was an acknowledged cultural centre and musicians and dancers from this region such as Budhan Mishra, Thapa Nepali to name a few, travelled extensively to Nepal, Bengal, Assam and Tripura beside the fact that the rulers of this region were related by marriage. Secondly, the Maithil script of Mithila, known as 'Tirhutta', is based on the Assamese-Bengali characters. On the issue of succession to the Mithila seat of power, an interesting factor that came to light was that due to a curse on the Mithila rulers, no direct descendant for the last many generations, has succeeded to the throne and the seat of power has always been handed down to an adopted son or nephew for the last many generations. Thus,

Maharaja Shubhankar of the Kharoire dynasty could very well have been Shubhankar, the author of Sri Hastamuktavali).

Even the opening shloka of the Śri Hastamuktavali has been dedicated to Lord Shiva and Parvati, mirroring the strong leaning towards Shaivism in certain pockets of Bihar, which is still evident today.

(While the script of Maithili is the 'Tirhutta' script, the script of the people of the Bhojpur area, especially of the Kayasthas was the 'Kaithi' script. A comparison has been attempted of the Devanagiri script with that of the 'Kaithi' and the 'Tirhutta' scripts in the annexure. While efforts are being made to preserve the 'Tirhutta lipi', the 'Kaithi lipi' seems to be fast disappearing into oblivion).

Costume

Having seen the same stance, position and hand gestures utilised in Kathak as on the statues and statuettes, a look at the costumes of the 'nats', 'natis' and 'yakshinis' are revealing. Ever since the 5th century BC, the area of Bihar has witnessed frequent contacts with the outside world, particularly from the west and the north and had witnessed many outside influences and intermingling of cultures starting from Aryanism mingling with the customs and habits of the original tribal inhabitants to trade and diplomatic contacts with the Greeks, Persians the Scythians, Indo-Chinese and the Mongols. Thus, imperceptible influences can be seen in the dressing habits of certain privileged sections of society, such as those of the upper classes and the dancers, Furthermore, the art of sewing was not unknown in Rig-Vedic India.

Both sewn and unsewn clothes were known in this area even during the pre-Mauryan period. The broken figure of Ajatsatru of Magadh shows him in sewn clothes. Similarly, the clothes of the 'nati' of Patliputra (See fig. 1) excavated near Patna in 1912 and dated around 200 B.C. clearly indicates sewn clothes as is evident from the flared frock, an underskirt and long tight pants. The dancer appears to have been caught in the motion of pirouette as her skirt is flared out, an aspect with Kathaks with which today's audience is not familiar. Her costume resembles a ballet

skirt, reminiscent of a short 'angarkha' that was in vogue in the sixties of this century. The figures of the other 'natis' also indicate some kind of a long diaphanous dress over tight pants with some of them sporting stylish head gears too.

However, the 'yakshi' of Didarganj is seen with an ankle length wrap from the waist with pleats in front. Interestingly, the back view of this 'yakshi' shows the borders of the wrap going continuously around the ankles. It, therefore, does not pass through the legs in order to be tucked at the back, thus giving evidence to the 'vikachchha' form of drape. Most of the statues of this area reveal clothing of the 'vikachcha' style of drape (see fig 10).

The costume prevalent between 325 B.C. to about tenth century A.D. had five predominant variations of the drapery or part sari or 'lehanga' pleated in front. These have been classified in the Vinayapitak text as :

(i) Hastishoundik (Pleats falling from below the navel);

(ii) Matsyavalak (the borders and the ends being gathered together in a manner resembling a fish fin);

(iii) Chatushkarnak (particular way of taking the corners of the drapery in two different direction);

(iv) Talvrintaka (the pleats being in the shape of a broad palm leaft); and

(v) Shatvallik (with a number of pleats and folds).

Usually, the lower garment and the pleated drapery were two separate pieces. On the breast was a "kanchuki", a kind of bodice tied at the back.

A quick comparison with the costumes of the dancers and women of medieval and modern Bihar as depicted in the various paintings of the Mithila region and of the Patna Qalam also show similarities, the only difference being that the veil becomes an integral part of the costume in the paintings of the medieval and the modern periods whereas it was absent in the earlier terracotta statuette representations, indicating the

social changes in the position of dance, status of women and customs and habit of the people that had occurred in these years.

Conclusion

To sum up, the study of various literary, sculptural and painting sources do reveal the continued presence of music and dance in Bihar wherein the dance seems to have been practised bearing a near vertical stance with hardly any prolonged exaggerated use of 'tribhangis' and the 'ardhamandalis'. The simplicity of lines in dance has remained unbroken over the last 2500 years. The dance was based on story-telling traditions wherein most of the traditional dancers were men and belonged to the Brahmin community. Even the posture of the 'natis' and other dancers seen in statues, carved panels and paintings available, reflect usage of 'pirouettes and poses in a naturalistic stance. All these factors indicate towards the form, poses and characteristics identifiable with the Kathak tradition as we know them today.

CHAPTER 4

Rulers and Zamindars as Artistes and Patrons

Having seen the rich cultural legacy of Bihar and the role and influence of ancient Kathak in the various dance and music systems, another important area to be explored is the patronage extended to the cultural way of life by the rulers and the people of the bygone eras. Without this interest, no work of art or temple building activities would have been possible nor would any literary work been undertaken. A sweeping glance at the various sculptures, temples, plays, treatises handed down to us as legacies have the imprint of the commissioning of such works by rulers of their times. Even in Bihar, the pattern was not different. The three predominant areas of Bihar namely Magadh, Anga and Videh (Mithila) desh have received significant contribution from the various rulers of their areas. Even though in Vaishali, the popular elected system by ballots where women participated was in vogue, yet the commune left an imprint on the cultural development of the area. Much later when the political system gave way to smaller principalities, 'rajas', 'zamindars' (landlords) and rich noblemen, yet it was the interest of some of them which led to the development of pockets of patronage to furtherance of music and dance. Predominant among these are the contributions from the areas of Mithila, Bettiah, Patliputra (presently known as Patna), Dumrao and Arrah, where some of the rulers and landlords were reputed artistes themselves.

In the nineteenth century, some of the artistes concentrating on the 'gayaki ang' and excelling in their chosen field of art were given the title of 'Malik' (or masters) which later became the Malliks. Unlike the Malliks

of Darbhanga, some members of the Malliks of Bettiah were also well versed in Kathak. In another turn of events, the fact of Kathaks taking to the 'gayaki ang' has been brought out by Virendra Kishore Rai Choudhary, disciple of Muhammad Ali Khan 'Rababi' that the "shishya (disciple) Samudaya" of Senia Ustad Haider Khan included many Kathaks. While the Darbhanga Malliks hailed originally from Rajasthan, the Bettiah Malliks hailed originally from the region around Delhi. (The Darbhanga Malliks ultimately settled at Amta Village near Darbhanga in Mithila).

The 'panchpatiya' system wherein the artiste was supposed to be well versed in the five arts of vocal music, instrumental, percussion, dance and poetry writing, was very evident in the State of Bihar. Most of the Brahamin artistes included many Kathaks within the family. Amongst the artistes following the Islamic faith, Kathak was danced either by the 'bhands' or by the 'courtesan dancers'. The emphasis of the dancers was on 'bhav nritya' and depending on the region, 'padas' or verses were chosen for enactment. For example, in the Mithila areas, 'Vidyapati padas' besides some traces of enactment of Geet Govind 'padas' were predominant while in Bettiah, compositions of the Maharajas were generally preferred for enactment.

(1) "Madhav tohe janu jah bidesa he Madhav.....
hamaro rang rabhas laye jayabaha,
layabhao kona sandesa,
banahi gaman karu hoyati dosar mati,
bisari jayeb pati mora,
heera mani manik eko nahi magab,
pheri magab pahu tora....."

(Vidyapati)

(2) "Madan kunj par baisal nagar,
brinda sakhi mukh chahi
jori jugal kar binati karaye kat,
turit milabah rahi.....
chandan chand pawan bhel ripu sama,
brindaban ban bhel

kokil madhur jhankar det kata,
majhu man manamatha sela...."

(Vidyapati)

(3) "saghan vana drum veli dar pat sab
lahan hat ritu basant ayo man
rang rang ke phoole phool saras sugandh
bhawar gunjat koyal kuhukata tani
sar sapt sampooran kar gaave kanth madh
upjawat tukan adi varnan jan
tinaki astut karat Anandkishore gawe'
pawe' man vanchit phal hoye' Vidyanidhan"

(Maharaj Anand Kishore)

(4) "pashupati girija pati har shankar ardhangi,
vamdev mahadev gangadhar shiva pinaki
Navalkishore yah kijiye' kripa drishti
bhakta yugal charan ko shambhu sahit sribhavani".

(Maharaja Naval Kishore)

(5) "piya ghar nahi, alee ri kaise' ke dhiraj dhariye
umange jauwan biraha sataye, rain diwas vaise sahiye
apahi jaye dwarika baithe, madan ke pat na jariye
ramkrishna prabhu aise na ye chahiye
kab laun yah dukh sahiye.

(Biraha)

The enactment of the dancers of the 'samadaon' and the 'nachari' geet of Vidyapati find mention in the 'Ain-e-Akabri" of Abul Fazal. However, the later emphasis on 'mridanga' ('pakhawaj') rhythmic patterns as well as the emergence of various compositions such as the 'sadra', 'sargam' and 'bargam' also added to the Kathak repertoire. Incidentally, it is therefore, not surprising to find a 'tala' being danced in Kathak unlike other dance forms where "a composition" is set to a particular 'tala'. There was a further development on the rhythmic front due to the

interest of the local rulers and landlords. A wide variety of 'bols' based on the tonal and aural sounds of nature were composed such as the 'kadak bijli paran', 'dawanal paran', 'kilkila paran', 'ashva paran' to name a few, with the rhythmic patterns meandering through various 'jatis' of 'laya' indicating prowess and full mastery over 'taal' and 'laya'.

Mithila

According to the Shatpath Brahmins, this region known as Videh in earlier times derives its name from Videh who from the banks of Saraswati crossed the river Gandak (Sadanira) and settled down in those areas. Later the region came to be known as Teermukhi and Mithila, the latter being the popular name which exists even today. The importance of the region can be gleaned from references in the Balmiki Ramayana.

"ramopi parmam poojam gautamasyamahatmanah;
sakastad vidhivat prapya jagam mithilam tatah"

The most well known king of those times was Raja Janak, father of Sita who alongwith Ram and Ravana form the central characters of the entire Ramayana episode. The prevalence of music and dance and the art of story telling through enactment by Lav Kush termed as "kushilavs" has been described by Balmiki. The five arts was not only encouraged in Janaka's court but his court also boasted of the well known Rishi Yagyavalkya who is accredited with the authorship of "Shukla Yajurveda". A reference to the prevelence of music and dance in society may be seen in the following text.

"natnartaka sanghanam gayakan ca gayatam,
tatah karnasukhvachah sushravah janata tataj"

(i.e. the people are entranced by the sweet words in the dance of the dancers and songs of the singers).

In the succeeding ages, the centre of music and dance shifted to Magadh and Patliputra. Even though there were many literary works (especially during the ninth to the eleventh century) replete with stories

of the knowledge and enlightenment of Sharada Devi, wife of Mandan Mishra, who defeated Guru Shankaracharya in a discussion on the "shastras" and works of Mandan Mishra such as the Vedantavartik, Vidhivivek, Brahmasiddhi, Madantrishati to Nyaya Kusumamjali by Udayan as well as works of Vachaspati Mishra, it was from the eleventh century AD that a great spurt in cultural activities was seen.

Raja Nanyadev (1097 - 1133) of the Karnat dynasty (whose ancestors apparantly hailed from Karnataka) was not only a great patron of music and dance but was himself a reputed musician and scholar. He is accredited with having written the treatise "Saraswati Hridayalankar", the manuscript of which is to be found in the Bhandarkar's Oriental Research Institute at Pune. This treatise is also known as 'Bharat bhashya'. In this work, Nanyadev has dwelt on the moods and temper associated with various 'ragas' and 'raginis' and the manner in which they should be utilised for enactment or renderings. During the rule of the last king of the Karnat dynasty, Raja Hari Singh Deo, emerges the name of an outstanding musician of his time, Jyotishwar Thakur (thirteenth century). In the treatise 'Varna Ratnakar' by Jyotishwar Thakur, thirty kinds of poses and 'mudras' employed in dance during its enactment have been described. In addition we find description of twenty varieties of 'veenas' and 'mridangas' and twenty kinds of 'talas' normally used by the dancers and musicians of those times.

With the establishment of the Oinwar dynasty of rulers, the court of Raja Sheo Singh (1417 -1476 approximately) saw great activities in the field of music, dance and poetry as Vidyapati, Gangesh and Pakshadhar Mishra adorned his court. The works of Pakshadhar Mishra include Prasanna Raghav and Chandralok while Vidyapati's contribution in his 'Padavali' containing poems and sonnets centering around Radha and Krishna are famous. Undoubtedly, Vidyapati shares a parallel position to Jaidev. While Jaidev wrote his 'padas' in Sanskrit, Vidyapati chose Maithili, his native language as the medium of expression. The 'nachari geet' of Vidyapati gained sway and dancers danced out his 'padas' and 'geets' while enacting out various episodes from the lives of Radha and Krishna.

During 1414 - 75, 'Sangeet Sarvaswa' by Jagdhar was written which was a critique on the Malti Madhav, the manuscript of which lies in Nepal. The play 'Anargha Raghav' by Murari Mishra contain episodes with dance. In the sixteenth century, Raja Shubhankar (1516-1607) of Mithila belonging to the Kharoire' dynasty stands out as not only being a great patron but also as an accomplished artiste himself. So well versed was he in the art of dance that he authored the 'Sri Hastamuktavali', a treatise containing a detailed description of the hand gestures, mudras and poses utilised in dance.

The discussion on the state of music and dance in Mithila would remain incomplete without a mention of the 'Ragtarangini' by Lochan. According to Bhatkhande, this work is considered to be a very important treatise in the history of north Indian classical music. Written in the seventeenth century, it deals with the development of 'ragas' and 'raginis', their character and form, the associated mood and description of the 'taals'. Interestingly, here we find the earliest mention of the 'khambavati' and the 'adana' as well as reference to the dance enactment of 'Vidyapati padas'. Other treaties on music and dance include the Sangeet Sangrah and the Lachhiraghav. This period also saw great travels by musicians and dancers. Budhan Mishra went to Bengal and later performed regularly in the court of Maharaja of Tripura.

In the eighteenth century, there was a slight shift in emphasis and of all the arts forms 'dhrupad gayan' found favour with the Mithila rulers. Radha Krishna and Karta Ram, sons of Ram Newaj and Sitaram sang in the durbar of Raja Madhav Singh (1775-1807). Trained by their father, uncle and Bhupat Khan Maharang, they were proficient in the "chaar-pad gayaki" viz. 'dhrupad', 'thumri', 'khayal' and 'tappa' and were known as 'Masters' or 'Malik' (or Malliks). In succeeding generations, the names of Gajraj Mallik and Rajitram Mallik stand out. During the rule of Maharaja Chhatra Singh (1808-1839), Bheem Singh Mallik though trained in 'dhrupad' made his mark as a 'mridanga' player. His performances were extolled by one and all including Senia Beenkar Nirmal Shah. From this point onwards, development of various 'bols' and 'parans' gained sway which in turn influenced the rhythmic patterns danced by the Kathaks.

In the twentieth century, the contributions of Pt. Ram Chatur Mallik (born in 1902) and Pt. Siyaram Tewari are well known. Raga Ratnakar and Bhakta Vinod have been authored by Shri Rajitram Malik, father of Ram Chatur Mallik. The Darbhanga 'raj' also patronised the late Darbari Das who in the Kaltob medium enacted out padas from the Geet Govind and Vidyapati Padavali. Another name in this field is that of Kameshwar Jha who danced in the Darbhanga court for about 15 to 20 years. (In Bihar, the 'raj' is basically an extremely large estate falling short of being dubbed as a kingdom).

Bettiah

Bettiah is the headquarter of western Champaran district. This region boasts of the famous Ashokan pillar just north of Lauriya Nandangarh while a funeral mound found there is said to be the only undisputable Vedic monument identified in India. A Roman Catholic mission was established in Bettiah in 1740. From the cultural point of view, Bettiah 'raj' came into prominence in the mid - seventeenth century, during the rule of Gaj Singh (1659-1694). Due to his cultural inclination, many artistes flocked to his 'durbar' (court) which included not only Kathakas but also singers and 'beenkars'. Chamari Mallik (vocalist) and Kangali Mallik (beenkar) alongwith other family members well versed in 'mridanga' and dance came to the Bettiah court from Amlok (near Kurukshetra). Thus, the court of Raja Gaj Singh saw regular musical soirees with 'dhrupad', 'pakhawaj' and 'kathak' performances. Here also, the tradition of 'pakhawaj' (or 'mridanga') players teaching rhythmic patterns to the dancers was seen. During the rule of Maharaja Jugal Kishore Singh (1762-1785), the names of Mukund Mallik ('dhrupad') and Jumraj Mallik (beenkar) come to the fore. In the succeeding generations, Dukhi Mallik and Bharati Mallik made their mark.

Another great patron musician was Maharaja Virkishore Singh (1785-1816) whose courts saw many 'kathak', 'been', 'dhrupad' and 'mridanga' programmes. However, the two brothers, Maharaja Anand Kishore Singh (1816-1835) and Maharaja Nawal Kishore Singh (1835-55) besides being great patrons were also great artistes and poets themselves.

reminiscent of the contributions of Nawab Wajid Ali Shah of Oudh. Pt. Shiv Dayal Mishra, disciple of Rahim Sen and Karim Sen, left Benaras and settled in Bettiah where he became the guru of Maharaja Anand Kishore and Maharaja Naval Kishore. So great was the interest of these two brothers that many 'padas' and 'geets' were composed by them and ideas for translating them into dance were given by them. A number of 'phag' and 'phag ki holi' were written by Maharaja Naval Kishore, the musical rendering and dance interpretations of which were done by the artistes of his time. These two royal brothers also made their mark as 'gurus'. Among their disciples were Bakhtawarji, Sheo Narayan Mishra, Jaikaran Mishra, Guru Prasad Mishra, with the three Mishra brothers being the grandsons of Pt. Shiv Dayal Mishra, guru of Maharaja Anand Kishore and Maharaja Naval Kishore.

The court of Maharaja Naval Kishore had many stars in the firmanent such as Gopal Mallik, Bauk Mallik, Gorakh Mishra, Kunj Behari Mishra, Fazal Khan, Kale Khan, Mehendi Husain. Maharaja Rajendra Kishore (1855-83) carried on the tradition of giving patronage to music and dance. All these rulers emphasied the 'panchpatiya' system and it was therefore not surprising to find some members of the family of vocalists or percussionists indulging in kathak patterns. As the various brothers of the Mishra family were interlinked by marriage, each generation saw a few Kathaks amongst them.

Other prominent names of the nineteenth century include those of Fakir Chand Mallik and Fazal Hussain 'bhand' (who was a reputed Kathak artiste). Senia Ustad Pyare Khan (son of Chhaju Khan rabab player) and Taj Khan (contemporary of Jafar Khan and Basat Khan). Veni Madhav Mishra, who was later employed in the Benaras court, was a disciple of Vishwanath Rai of Bettiah who, in turn, was a disciple of Pt. Shiv Dayal Mishra. Another disciple of Pt. Shiv Dayal Mishra by the name of Shyam Narain Mishra became a court artiste of Jorasanko Thakur at Calcutta. While Bholanath Pathak was a disciple of Jaikaran Mishra of Bettiah, Radhika Prasad Goswami, a well known artiste of Bengal, was the disciple of Guru Prasad Mishra. The singers of the 'Vishnupur gharana' were

disciples of the Bettiah artistes. Thus, the contribution of Bettiah 'raj' to the development and propagation of music and dance was immense. At Bettiah, the 'sargams' and the 'sadras' (the latter being a variation of the 'sargam') and the 'bargam' were not only sung but also influenced the repertoire of Kathak.

Patliputra

Located south of Ganga, Patliputra capital of Magadh has a rich history as it saw the great Haryank dynasty and the golden periods of the Mauryan and the Gupta empires. Thus, it had dominated the greater part of Indian history politically, socially, culturally and economically. The concept of an empire through annexation by conquest or matrimonial alliances which began with Bimbisara but strengthened by Ajatsatru reached the pinnacle during the Mauryan and the Gupta epochs. Magadh itself was known as 'Keekat' in the pre-Aryan period while Patliputra too was known by various names. In Vedic times, it was probably called Kusumpur mainly because of the availability of abundance of flowers especially, the Patli rose. Reference is made to it by late Pt. Sakal Narayan Sharma, head of the Sanskrit Department at Calcutta University. According to the Kathasaritasagar, the name is attributed to the famous love story between Prince Putrak and his beloved Patli. Reference to east and west Patliputra can be found as the "Poorva Patliputrak" and "Agar Patliputrak" in Panin's sutras (4/2/123 & 7/3/14 respectively). Another reference to Patliputra appears in the 'Mahabhashya' of Patanjali as "Anushonam Patliputram" (i.e. Patliputra on the banks of the Sone). Damodar Gupt, the court poet of Kashmir called it the "Mukutmani" and likened it to the jewel of the three worlds ('trailokya').

Patliputra had started gaining importance during the time of Ajatsatru but it was his son, Udayan, who shifted the capital from Rajgir to Patliputra. In 487 B.C., Buddha had rested at Patligram while going from Vaishali to Rajgir. It also came to be known as an "abode for culture and learning" as is evident from references in Mahakavi Rajshekhar's "Kavyamimansa" and Mahakavi Somdev's Kathasaritasagar (1063-1083

approximately). Other well known references are the writings of Hiuen Tsang and FaHien.

Around 1574, Mughal Emperor Akbar gave the 'subedari' of Bihar to his brother-in-law, Raja Man Singh. To commemorate the well in the place where the 'pat' or the dress of Sati (wife of Shiva), fell, Raja Mansingh commissioned the building of the Patan Devi temple. Legend has it that when Sati threw herself into the 'havan agni' (the sacrifical fire) at the house of her father, Daksha, in order to avenge the dishonour meted out to her husband Shiva, the latter was grief stricken and in this state took the corpse of Sati in his arms and danced vigorously. Places or worship have sprung up at each of the regions where the parts of Sati's body fell and so it was with Patna which owes its present name to Patan Devi.

In the fifth century B.C., Magadh patronised music and dance. It is said that the court of Bimbisara, the then ruler, boasted of Salvati, an accomplished dancer of her time well versed in the 'lasya nritya' and rhythmic intricacies. So gifted was she that it is believed that while her rival Amrapali from the neighbouring kingdom of Vaishali received 50 gold coins for each performance Salvati commanded a fee of 100 gold wins. Another well known dancer in the court of Bimbisara was Padmavati who later was known as 'Abhay mata' and joined the 'Buddhist sangha' in a manner similar to that of Amrapali. The court of Ajatsatru (495-463 BC) also patronised a number of dancers. In the 'girag samaja and in the samajjas', people flocked to see the performance of dancers. The name of Kosha (also known as Ghosha) who lived around 392 BC approximately appears in Jain literature. She enjoyed name and fame for her unparalleled excellence in dance and also for her beauty. She was bestowed with the title of 'Roop' and hence was popularly known as 'Roopkosha'. It appears that she won fame for being able to dance on the tip of a needle. (This factor is very similar to the tradition of some of the Kathaks of Rajasthan and Gujarat where the dancer dances on the sharp edges of a dozen swords as well as on the sharp pointed edges of a bed of nails. The author, as a child, had witnessed such a performances

of my then guru, the late Shri Kundanlal, at the C.J. Auditorium in Bombay in 1960).

In the medieval period, many rich landlords or noblemen became the new patrons. The 'purdah' system in vogue only permitted dance by male Kathaks, 'bhands' or courtesan dancers. As far as the courtesans were concerned, two kinds of 'mehfils' were pravelent. The night 'mehfils' called 'Khari mehfils' starting at 8.00 p.m. and lasting till the early hours of the morning when Raga Bhairavi was sung, usually saw dance performances by the courtesan dancers. Other 'mehfils' were called the 'mujra mehfils'. These 'mehfils' usually became the subject of painters and have been commented upon by various European travellers.

During his visit to Patna in 1811-12, Buchanan found that of the five well known dancers, Mahtab was the most favoured. Her performances were of such high order that in the dance festivals held at Calcutta, her charges were amongst the highest, her fees in those days being Rs. 1000/- for three performances. Fazal Husain 'Bhand' was a reputed male dancer in the kathak style whose 'ang' and 'pad sanchalan' were well known. In the mid-nineteenth century, Choudhrain, disciple of Bindadin Maharaj, gained immense popularity as a dancer. A story goes that in a 'mehfil' organised at the wedding of Mansoor Hussain, barrister, son of Wifayat Hussain of Mohalla Lodi Katara, both Choudhrain and Fazal Husain were invited to perform. In the duet between the two dancers, both kept pace with each other (Fazal despite his advanced years) much to the delight of the spellbound audience. Pt. Kesho Maharaj, well versed in 'mridanga' (pakhawaj), was also associated with dance as many rhythmic patterns danced by the dancers have been attributed to him.

Zohra bai, originally from Agra, learnt music and dance in the durbar of Maharaja of Darbhanga in 1885 whereafter she came and settled in Patna. One of her contemporary dancers, Badi Kaneez, was reputed both for her beauty as well as for her dance, but unfortunately, she died an alcoholic. Haiderjan Begum, after receiving training from Bindadin Maharaj at Lucknow, came to Patna around the year 1880. Her dance was bold and aggressive in attitude while Allah Jilai, who unfortunately

died young at the tender age of 24 had made her mark as a graceful dancer.

So great was the patronage given to music and dance that Muhammad Raza not only wrote a book 'Nagmat Asfi' which has been commented upon by H.A. Pople in the 'Music of India' but he also introduced a new instrument called "Thaat".

The twentieth century saw a completely different scenario and mehfils resounding with music and dance faded. It was, therefore, not surprising to encounter a passive or rather negative attitude of the people to dance.

Vaishali

The earliest mention of Vaishali is found in the Balkand section of Balmiki's Ramayana. While on their way to Raja Janak's kingdom, Ram and Lakshman had to pass through Vaishali which was then known as Vishalpuri, ruled by Raja Sumati. According to the Vishnupuran, the royal dynasty of Vaishali started from the son of a dancer apsara, Alambusha, but according to the Ramayana, the royal dynasty was started by Vishal, son of Ikshvaku.

After the Mahabharata war, democracy was established in the state where, according to the Jataka stories, 7707 persons (the total population of the town) chose their representatives to the Vajji Sangh (the council) which had become all powerful. Ladies were also given the right to franchise. Music and dance had become a way of life. Annual dance contests were also held by the learned and the initiated. It also appears that items were choreographed by "vidwans" (the learned). While discussing the dancers of the time, the name of Amrapali comes to the fore. She was considered to be the most outstanding dancers of her time in Vaishali whose dexterous footwork and graceful 'bhav nritya' were extolled by all connoisseurs. So great was her fame that it had even spread to neighbouring Magadh.

Other dancers of this era were Vimla, Jayanti, Rohini, Vasishti,

Mahanar and Singha. Quite a few of them turned to Buddhism, as can be gleaned from the Therigatha. Thus, here was a situation that it was the whole community which gave sanction and encouragement to the arts.

The medieval period saw the absence of 'rajahs', or 'nawabs', and therefore, patronage concentrated in the hands of the 'rais' (rich noblemen) or 'zamindars' (landlords). The 'bhands' such as Amanullah 'bhand' and Ataullah 'bhand' and courtesans trained in the kathak style with sprinkling of representation of some of the family of 'Ras' dancers. smaller unknown Kathaks (primarily 'Mishras' whose families had connections with the temples at some point of time) came to be associated with the area.

Dumrao

The durbar of Dumrao 'raj' came into prominence as patrons of music and dance in the nineteenth century. Dhanarangji was the author of 'Krishnayan' based on the "leelas" of Lord Krishna. The contents of this work became the subject of enactment by the artistes of the time. Other artistes who received patronage by the Dumrao Maharaja were Ram Prasad Pande, Sahdeo Mallik and a number of 'mridanga' players such as Pt. Vasudev Upadhyay, Baldeo Upadhyay, Ramji Upadhyay, Pannalal Upadhyay, Vishnu Deo Pathak and Ramashish Pathak. Quite a few of the 'mridanga' players imparted lessons in Kathak and the rhythmic syllables and patterns.

Arrah

Bhojpur was historically the capital of the Ujjain Rajput kings, descendents of Raja Bhoj of the Paramara dynasty. The Ujjain Rajputs invaded and defeated the aboriginal Chero people. The names of Arrah and Chhapra stand out in later times as centres of culture where the larger number of patrons of art were to be located.

As in the case of Raigarh, the 'zamindars' of Jamira estate stand out prominently as patrons of music and dance.

Family Tree of the zamindars of Jamira

Pratap Narayan Singh

|

Chhatrasal Narayan Singh

|

Hit Narayan Singh

|

Shatrunjay Prasad Singh

Of the four generations of artiste patrons, perhaps the most outstanding contribution has been from Shatrunjay Prasad Singh alias Lallanji. Not only as an adept 'mridanga' player but also being well trained in tabla and kathak, he made his mark as a good teacher. Born on 27th July 1901, he grew up in an atmosphere of music. His great grandfather, Babu Pratap Narayan Singh was an accomplished vocalist and instrumentalist ('surbahar'). His grandfather, Babu Chhatrasal Narayan Singh also followed in his father's footsteps. Lallanji's father, Hit Narayan Singh was an accomplished 'dhrupad' singer, being a disciple of Ustad Tassadik Hussain Khan, who in turn was the disciple of Ustad Gulam Khan (the singer at the court of Nawab Wajid Ali Shah). The house of the Singhs in all the generation saw many music and dance evenings where not only did they themselves perform but also many performances of various 'kathak' and 'mridanga' artistes and vocalists were held.

This interest was amply reflected in Lallanji. After being initiated into music and dance by his father, Lallanji learnt the 'mridanga' in 1917 from Pt. Deoki Nandan Pathak, disciple of Madan Mohan Upadhyay of Kodiveera gharana. He accompanied, on the 'mridanga', the 'dhrupad' performances of his father. Later he also learnt from Prof. Pt. Sakharam at Maurice College, Lucknow. Side by side, he learnt the art of 'tabla' from Ustad Hussain Baksh Khan Saheb alias Bade Miyan. Having been initiated into dance by his fore fathers where he enacted out the dhrupad verses, he became a disciple of Shri Achhan Maharaj at Lucknow.

Lallanji's achievements as an artiste was enormous at the age of 19. His performance at the All India Music and Dance Conference at Allahabad made all critics notice him. Similarly, the performances at Calcutta in 1942 at the Sri Gyan Prakash Ghosh Sansthan and Delhi in 1944 at the All India Music and Dance Conference held at the Red Fort were memorable. He was honoured with many awards such as the "Mridanga Chakra Choodamani" in 1949 by the Sangeet Parishad, Kabir Chowra, Benaras, "Laya Bhaskar" by the All India Music conference, the State Award in 1953 and the State Fellowship for music and dance by the then President of India, Dr. Rajendra Prasad.

Lallanji set up the Marut Nandan Shahabad Sangeet Sangh at Arrah and imparted training in mridanga and Kathak to eager disciples from all over the country. Some of his prominent disciples in Kathak include the late Pt. Ramji Pandey, Dashrath Kathak of Lohardagga, Vijaya Deshpande (presently teaching kathak at Patna), Raghunathji, Arvindji Srivastava (at Arrah) and Mohini (Courtesan). He also composed and conducted many choirs.

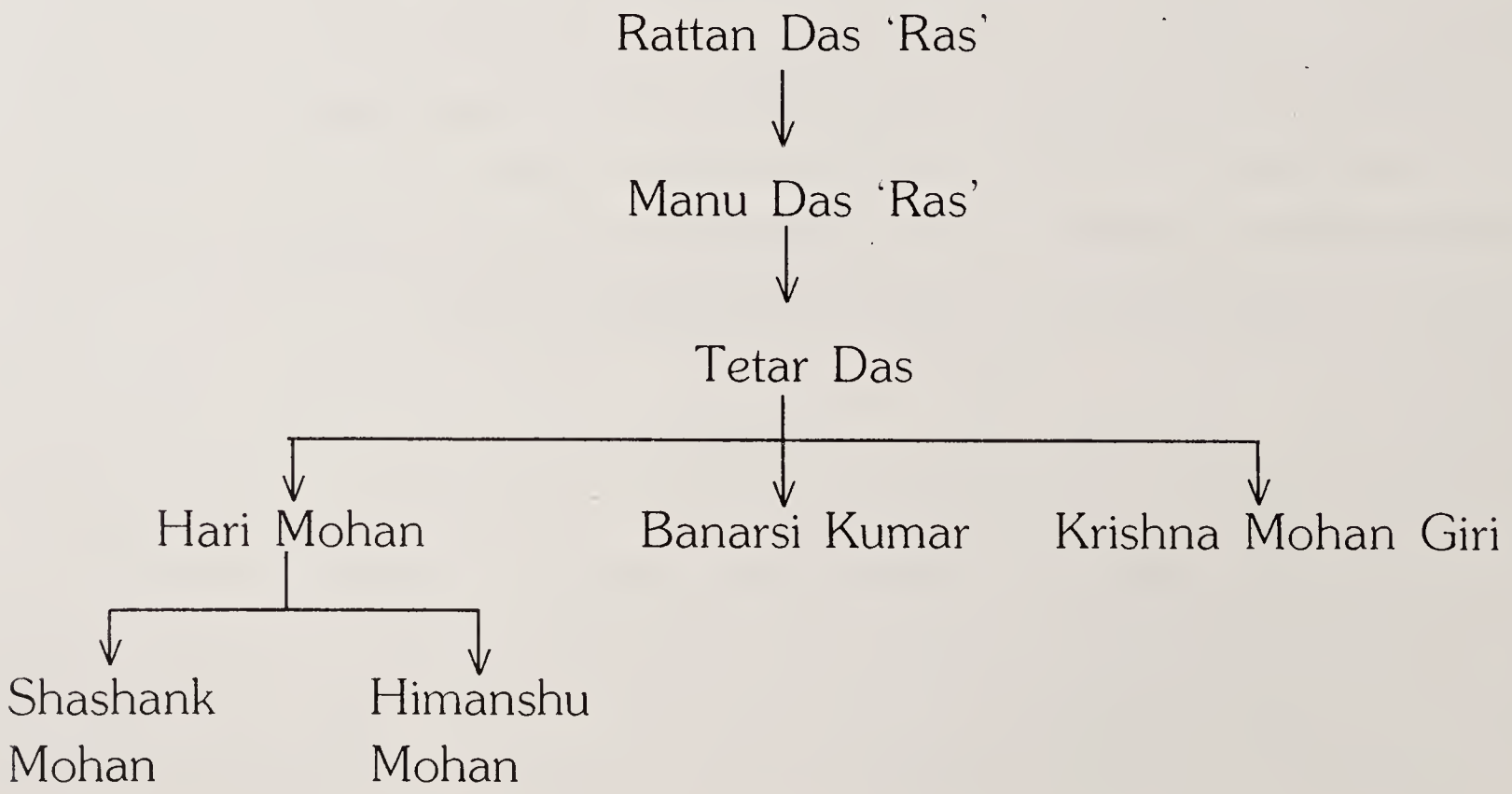
Apart from this zamindar family, there seemed to be an atmosphere favouring music and dance at Arrah, as is evident from a reference in the Government of India Publication on Bihar which stated that most of the dancing girls at Varanasi at one time, hailed from some particular villages of Bhabua, a sub-division of Shahabad district as well as the development of the 'Rivilganj parampara' of mridanga whose great artiste representative was Sanyasiji. A tradition of Kathaks also seems to have been located around the Dhelaji mandir and the Raghuvansh Sahay mandir at Chhapra besides the noted Bhagwan bazar and Jalalpur bazar.

CHAPTER 5

Traces of hereditary Kathak families

With frequent political and social turmoil, Bihar did not provide the necessary environment for the development of a gharana. The pre-occupation of the people with problems of daily survival, caste-wars, lack of attention by the central powers and paucity of wealthy or economically sound centres encouraged the migratory pattern of artistes. The interest of a few rulers such as those of Darbhanga and Bettiah did provide the necessary impetus to the development of arts but because of their personal inclination leaning heavily towards vocal and instrumental music, these areas saw development of a 'gharana' system. Kathak, therefore, received only a passing attention. Despite those hurdles, some traces of hereditary Kathak families could be traced.

(1) Family of Rattan Das "Ras" (Samastipur)



Hailing from Samastipur, village Sugapatak, the family of Rattan Das was a traditional family of 'Ras-leela' dancers wherein stories of Radha Krishna were sung and enacted. Apparently, the tradition of Ras has been in this Brahmin family in the last many generations going back to 300-400 years but apart from this fact no other names or details could be obtained before the period of Rattan Das.

The Ras-leela enactments utilised movements and rhythmic patterns seen and practised in Kathak. As per tradition, each artiste was also adept in the art of singing and percussion playing. The grandson of Shri Rattan Das, by the name of Shri Tetar Das, inclined towards tabla and the sarangi in the later period of his life. He died over a decade ago at the ripe old age of 125 years. However, the family tradition of 'Ras' was handed down to his sons, Hari Mohan and Krishna Mohan Giri, in addition to training in tabla and music. Hari Mohan furthered his training in Kathak under the tutelage of the late Guru Sonelal Choudhry at Begusarai and Pt. Laxman Prasad (Bombay-wale). Even though he trained extensively in Kathak and even imparted training to his younger brother Krishna Mohan, his forte remained vocal music. After his death in 1987, the mantle fell on the shoulders of Krishna Mohan.

Initiated into Kathak from a tender age first by his father Shri Tetar Das and then by his elder brother Hari Mohan, Krishna Mohan Giri furthered his training in Kathak from late Pt. Ram Narayan Mishra at Calcutta. (Pt. Mishra himself was a disciple of shri Achhan Maharaj). The special features of his dance lie in the execution of short rhythmic patterns and abhinaya. Presently teaching at Patratu, his tours take him to various parts of the State where his students are to be found.

(2) Mishra family (Muzaffarpur)

The Mishra family of Hariharpur village, Azamgarh, was a family deeply steeped into the various art forms. The family moved from Azamgarh to Muzaffarpur while another branch of the family moved to Bhagalpur. Today, the family has spread its roots as representatives are located at Patna, Muzaffarpur and Delhi. In terms of relationship, marriages took place between the close community of Mishras and hence

their relationship to the various branches of the Mishra families of Kabir Chowra Benaras, Lucknow and Bhagalpur can be seen. Some branches of the family later spread to Chhapra and Ranchi. Markandey Mishra Mallik of Mazhagarh (near Chhapra) is a close relative.

Pingalgi, with whom the tree of the family starts, was a nephew of Thakur Prasad of the Lucknow gharana. His forte lay in the field of music. His sons, Sona Mishra and Dholai Mishra excelled in the art of sarangi playing. Sonaji was a gifted vocalist too. One of the four sons of Sona Mishra viz. Shyamlal Mishra took to the practice of Kathak. Shyamlal alias Jokhu Maharaj became a disciple of Achhan Maharaj at Lucknow. On returning to Bihar, he along with Kedar Prahlad Mishra set up the Sharada Sangeet Sadan at Bhagalpur in 1950 in order to impart training in Kathak. The programme of kathak staged by the prisoners of Bhagalpur Central Jail who had been trained by Jokhu Maharaj won the admiration of the then Governor, Dr. Zakir Husain and Chief Minister, Sribabu. The performance by the prisoners won the first prize in a dance competition held at Jaipur. The silver shield won by them adorns the Governor House at Patna till today.

Jokhu Maharaj also held the post of Director in the Music Department of Bhagalpur University. He also held the post of dance teacher at the Sunderwati Mahila College. After spending 25-30 years at Bhagalpur, he moved to Ranchi for about 10 years before making Patna his base.

Ram Chandra Maharaj received training in Kathak from his uncle Jokhu Maharaj as well as from another relative, Krishna Maharaj. While Jokhu Maharaj had learnt from Acchan Maharaj, Krishna Maharaj was a disciple of Shambhu Maharaj. Assimilating the best of both the gurus, Ram Chandra Maharaj performed and taught at Muzaffarpur before going to Tilaiya.

Another cousin of Jokhu Maharaj was Badri Mishra who took to the art of tabla. His sons, Pt. Chhanulal Mishra, Vishwanath Mishra and Sheoji Mishra are great performers in the fields of vocal music, tabla and

Table 1

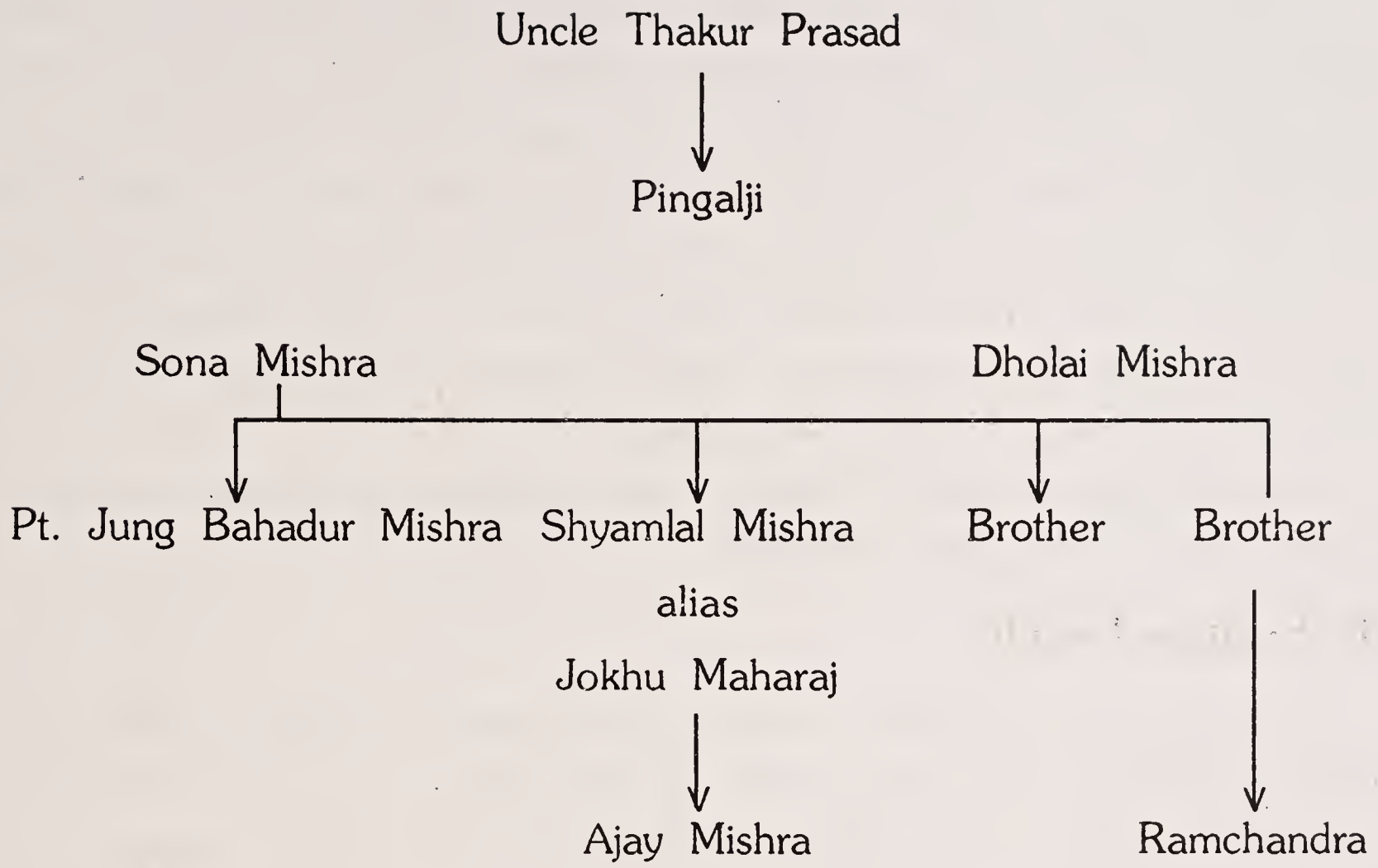
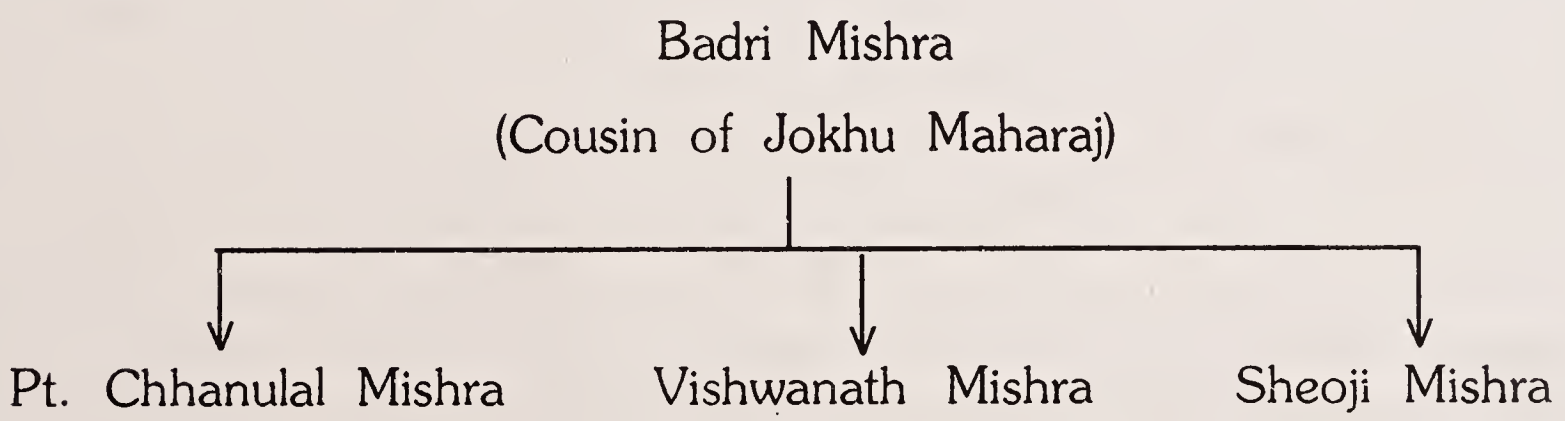


Table II:



Kathak respectively. Sheoji, having learnt from his cousin, the well known maestro, pt. Birju Maharaj, is presently teaching at Patna.

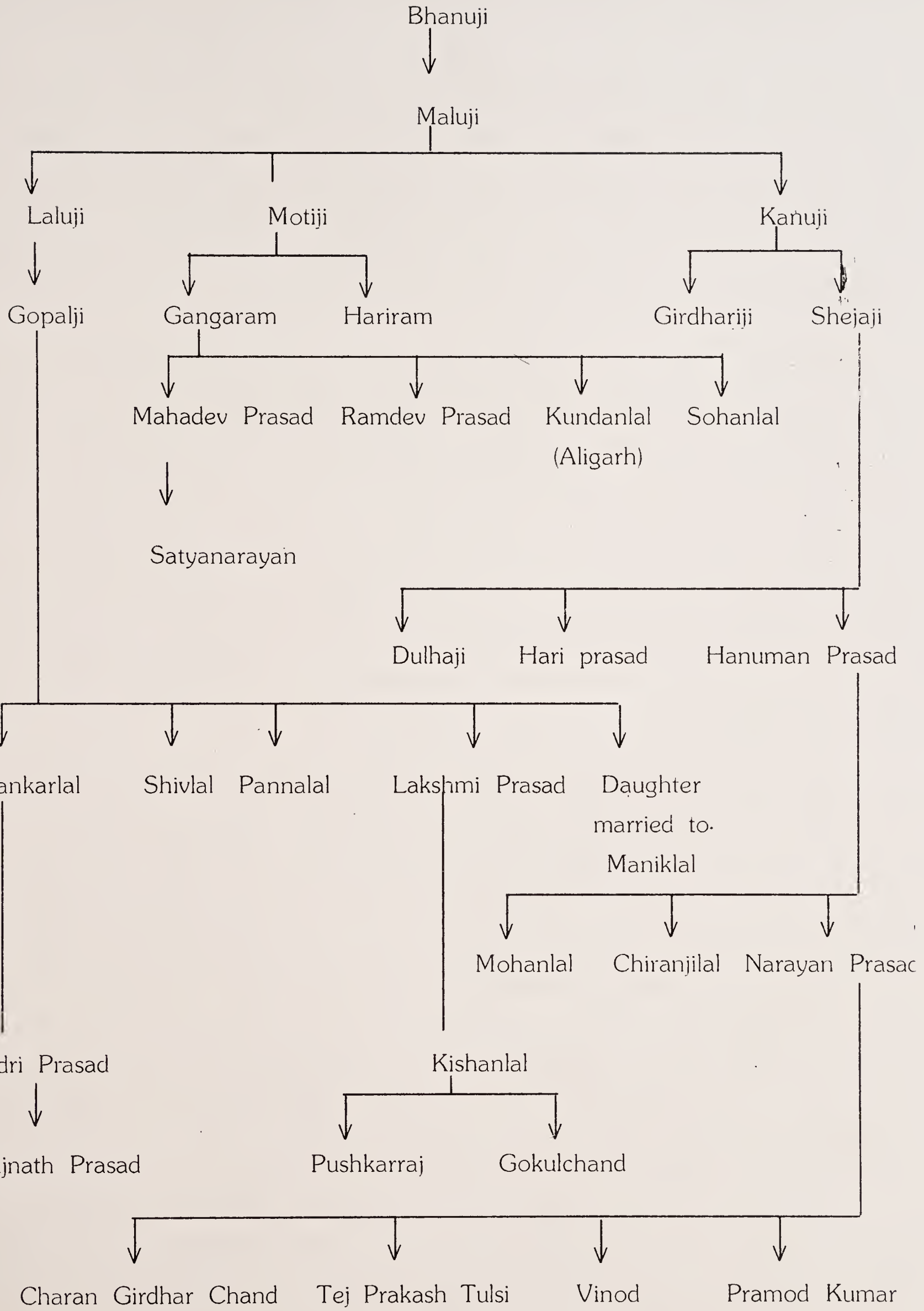
This branch of the family is closely related to the other Mishra families of Bhagalpur. Ram Naresh Mishra, besides teaching Kathak mnemonics, is an adept tabla artiste and vocalist. He is the uncle ('Phupha') of Vishwanathji and Sheoji. Similarly, the sons of Nanhu Mishra viz. Arun Mishra teaching tabla at Calcutta, Arjun Mishra teaching Kathak at Lucknow and Nakul Mishra, tabla artiste at AIR, Ahmedabad are carrying on the family tradition. Arjun Mishra is a disciple of Pt. Ram Narayanji (Calcutta) and Pt. Birju Maharaj (Delhi). One of the sons-in-law of Vishwanathji is Nakul Mishra while another son-in-law is Deepak Mishra, son of Pt. Birju Maharaj.

(3) Sridhar Family

The source of another family of Kathak is located in Rajasthan, village Gopalpura, tehsil Sujangarh. Gopalji, the great grandson of Bhanuji migrated to Bihar in the Nineteenth century. The family stayed on for three generations; however as is prevalent in this age, members of the present generation have moved away. The complete family tree is shown in the following chart.

Gopalji : Son of Laluji and grandson of Maluji, Gopalji was a great 'panchpatiya' artiste as he had mastered not only Kathak but also was adept at vocal music, tabla, sarangi and poetry writing. In the mid-nineteenth century, he migrated to Naugachhia. He performed all over Bihar especially Gaya, Bhagalpur, Chhapra and Champanagar in district Champaran. His performances in the specially organised music and dance soirees in the court of Maharaja Shyamanand Singh were hailed by all connoisseurs. Even though he was well versed in the 'khayal', 'dhrupad', 'dhamar', 'tappa' yet it was his renderings of 'thumri', 'chaiti', 'kajari', 'maand', 'bhajan' that invoked the admiration of all.

Shankarlal: Having received his training from his father Gopalji, Shankarlal also grew up to be an accomplished 'panchpatiya' artiste. To further the Kathak nuances, he studied under the great masters Kalka


Bhanuji
Maluji
Laluji
Motiji
Kanuji
Gopalji
Gangaram
Hariram
Girdhariji
Shejaji
Mahadev Prasad
Ramdev Prasad
Kundanlal
(Aligarh)
Sohanlal
Satyanarayan
Dulhaji
Hari prasad
Hanuman Prasad
Shankarlal
Shivlal
Pannalal
Lakshmi Prasad
Daughter married to Maniklal
Mohanlal
Chiranjilal
Narayan Prasad
Badri Prasad
Kishanlal
Baijnath Prasad
Pushkarraj
Gokulchand
Charan Girdhar Chand
Tej Prakash Tulsi
Vinod
Pramod Kumar

Bindadin Maharaj at Lucknow before returning to Naugachhia where his fame spread day by day.

Shivlal : As was prevalent those days, Shivlal was again trained as a 'panchpatya' by his father and elder brother. However, vocal music and Kathaks remained his strong points. Due to his well formed and strong body physique, he even evinced an interest in wrestling. He died at Naugachhia childless around 1925 or 1930 of old age after having propagated the art from in and around the area.

Pannalal: The third son of Goplaji, Pannalal, mastered the arts of vocal music and Kathak. Bestowed with an arresting personality, he was an acclaimed Kathak of the region. However, in his later days he tended towards vocal music. Having received further training from Miyan Jankhan, he was influenced by the 'sapat tan gayaki' of Gohar Jan. His performances were well received in far flung areas of Baroda, Benaras, Raigarh, court of Rampur, Hyderabad, Champanagar (Garh Baneri), Bikaner, Arrah, Chhapra to name a few besides his home town Naugachhia. He even broadcast over AIR in the early days. He died in 1951 at Sujangarh.

Lakshman Prasad : Even though he was groomed throughly by his three elder brothers in the arts of vocal and instrumental music and Kathak, he tended towards tabla in his later days. His tabla rendering not only displayed the Delhi, Benaras and Jaipur "baz", but his proficiency in Kathak was reflected in the various rhythmic patterns and styles of playing. He soon gave up giving Kathak performances and became a tabla player and accompanist to various known artistes of his time. He was well versed in Hindi, Urdu and Persian and could recite and enact the entire *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*. For a short while, he taught at Pilani. He died in 1988 at the ripe old age of 95 years.

Badri Prasad: The eldest son of Shankarlal, Shri Badri Prasad received training in Kathak, vocal music and tabla from his uncle Lakshman Prasad. As Naugachhia was his home, he stayed for the greater part of his life in this town teaching and playing the tabla. Shortly before

his death in 1953, he had moved to the Gandharva Mahavidyalaya at Delhi. His son, Baijnath is employed in Delhi as a tabla player.

Kishan Lal: Kishan Lal was the son of Lakshman Prasad who was groomed by his uncle, Pannalal, to be a vocalist. As per the family tradition, he had also received extensive training in tabla and Kathak. However, as his interest lay in the field of vocal music, he represented the 'Khayal gayaki' and the 'poorabang' of rendering 'thumris', 'Chaitis', 'kajaris', 'jhoolas', 'bhajans' and 'geet'. Most of his life was spent in Bihar; however in his later years, he was appointed as lecturer in music at Porbandar College (Gujarat) followed by his appointment as a tabla teacher at the Baroda Music College where he died on 8th August 1990. His son, Pushkarraj, now teaches tabla at the same music college at Baroda.

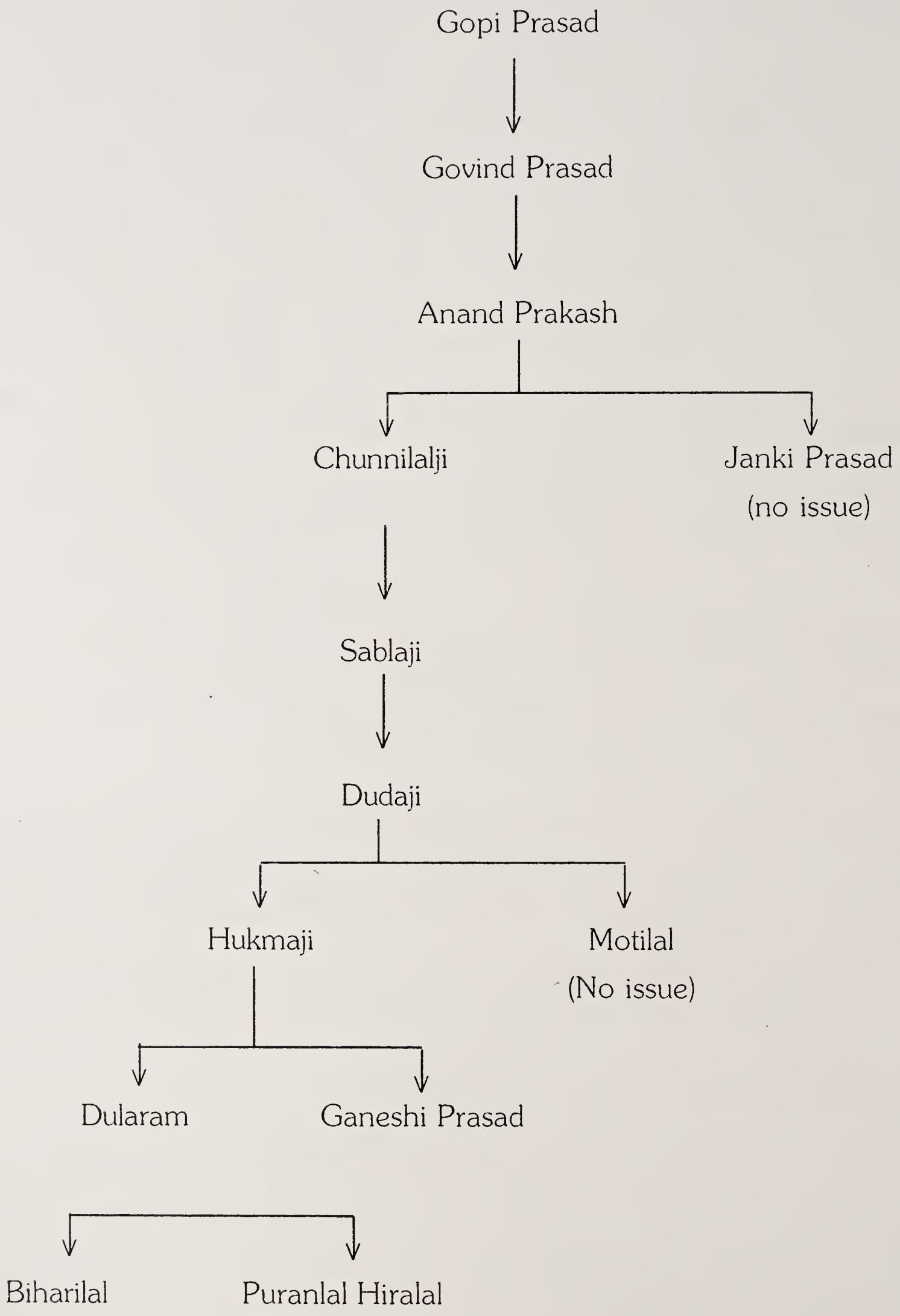
Maniklal (alias Malji): Being married to the daughter of Gopalji, Maniklal (son of Shivji and grandson of Hamirji of Jodhpur) made Naugachhia his home and spent a number of years teaching and performing Kathak and especially vocal music.

Sheolalji: Who was a cousin of Shyamlalji (who in turn was the father of late Pt. Shiv Prasad, the well known music composer) spent a number of years at Darbhanga. He performed extensively in Bihar and Nepal.

Mohanlalji : Elder brother of late Narayan Prasadji spent his years at Gidhaur in Bihar where he propagated the arts of Kathak and tabla.

(4) Branch of Janki Prasad Family

With the easy mobility of Kathaks witnessed during the last hundred fifty years or so, Janki Prasad, a Kathak from Bikaner migrated to Varanasi and laid the foundations of the Janki Prasad gharana, later popularly known as the Benaras gharana. Dularamji, sons of Hukmaji (the latter being the great grand nephew of Janki Prasad) migrated to the court of Bettiah in Bihar while his sons, Biharilal and Hiralal, spent later years at Indore with the third brother, Puranlal, going over to Bombay.


Gopi Prasad
Govind Prasad
Anand Prakash
Chunnilalji
Janki Prasad
(no issue)
Sablaji
Dudaji
Hukmaji
Motilal
(No issue)
Dularam
Ganeshi Prasad
Biharilal
Puranlal Hiralal

CHAPTER 6

Summary of predominant artistes (Dancers) of the last 150-200 years

Even in the prevailing atmosphere of disinterest and apathy towards dance despite the rich cultural heritage and the patronage given to music and dance, the information gathered from various sources led to a number of artistes who had been performing and teaching in various parts of the State in the last two centuries. A town-wise summary of the same is being attempted below :

Samastipur

The family of Rattan Das 'Ras' performed the 'leelas' of Srikrishna in the Kathak idiom. Hailing from village Sugapatak, Samastipur, the family tradition of dance was handed down in succeeding generations. Rattan Das is the forefather whose name is still remembered. His son Manu Das, grandson Tetar Das and great grandsons, Hari Mohan & Krishna Mohan Giri, have carried on the family tradition.

Arrah and Chhapra

(i) *Shatrunjaya Prasad Singh alias Lallanji* : His is the most outstanding of all names as an artiste and patron. The contribution of his father, Hit Natayan Singh, grandfather Chhatrasal Narayan Singh and great grandfather Pratap Narayan Singh were no less. Lallanji was a disciple of Achhan Maharaj. The disciples of Lallanji have also made their mark in the fields of Kathak and mridanga (pakhawaj).

(ii) *Ramji Pandey,* disciple of Lallanji, even though trained to be a performer, made his mark as a teacher.

(iii) *Raghunathji* was also a disciple of Lallanji who propagated the art form.

(iv) *Arvindji Srivastava*, disciple of Lallanji, is presently living in Arrah and imparting training in Kathak.

(v) *Mohini*, a courtesan, received training in Kathak from Lallanji at Arrah. So gifted was she that her performance won laurels at the Calcutta and Allahabad Conferences. She now leads a retired, married life.

(vi) *Vijaya Deshpande*, hailing from Maharashtra, came to Bihar after her marriage and learnt Kathak from Lallanji at Arrah.

(vii) *Hamidni*, a courtesan dancer of the early part of this century who lived at Bhagwan bazar at Chhapra was a proficient Kathak artiste. Even though her forte was thumri abhinaya yet she was equally well known for her rhythmic virtuosity.

(viii) *Late Shankar Deo Jha*, belonging to a Brahmin family of Darbhanga steeped in the traditiion of music and dance, had lived in Arrah and Chhapra. He was a disciple of Achhan Maharaj and after his death, also learnt from Guru Narayan Prasad. He had been awarded the title of 'Natraj'. The tradition of Kathak in his family is being carried on by his daughters, Poornima Jha and Neena Jha.

Patna

In the last two centuries, the names which repeatedly came to the fore were the names of 'bhands' and 'courtesan dancers'. It is only in the tweintieth century that we hear names of those other than the courtesans and the 'bhands', reflective of the change in social customs and habits as well as the prominance of gurus as compared to earlier times. Some of the well known 'tawaif' dancers and 'bhands' of the nineteenth century were Mahtab, Choudhrain, Zohra Bai, Allahilai, Badi Kaneez, Haider Jan Begum and Fazal Husain 'bhand', who have been discussed in detail in the preceding chapter.

(ii) *Late Chandrashekhar Mishra, alias Mridulji* was a disciple of Pt.

Govind Mishra, nephew of Sitara Devi. Well steeped in the Benaras gharana tradition, his style represented the beauty of 'dance bols' without dilution from various other mnemonics.

(iii) *Bhagwati Guru of Kadam Kuan,* Sahitya Sammelan Patna, was trained in Kathak at Benaras. His disciples at Patna included Smt. Vijaya Deshpande and Shanti Devi.

(iv) *Shanti Devi,* earlier known as Shanti Bai was a well known courtesan dancer of Patna city. Deeply interested in dance, she especially learnt the art from Bhagwati Guru. Her fame for her graceful rendering of thumri abhinaya and her sparkling rhythmic virtuosity spread far and wide.

(v) *Vijaya Deshpande*, hailing from Maharashtra came to Bihar after her marriage where she was immersed in the cultural environment present in her husband's home. She learnt Kathak from Bhagwati Guru but later went to Arrah to learn further from Guru Lallanji. She returned to Patna and did yeoman service in setting up a small school to teach the art of Kathak to girls from good families of Bihar who had slowly started emerging from the shadows of the old purdah society.

(vi) *Pt. Vishwanath Misra* aged about 80 years and originally hailing from Darbhanga now lives at Patna with his sons. As a child, he was interested in music and dance, an interest that was nurtured by his family. He became a 'durbari kathak' at Darbhanga. The hunger for learning more took him to Bombay in 1944 where he learnt Kathak from Pt. Gauri Shankar of the Jaipur gharana. During his stay in Bombay he worked in films as a dancer and a make-up artist. He received a lot of encouragement from the Goenka family.

Around 1948-49, he went to Calcutta where he became the disciple of Sukhdeo Maharaj and learnt Kathak of the Benaras School. Completing his training and after his sojourn in the film and theatre worlds of Calcutta and Bombay, he returned to Patna and devoted himself to the propagation of Kathak. Besides being a solo dancer himself, he coreographed a number of ballets on mythological themes based on Sanskrit poetries and on the works of Vidyapati. He also held the post

of Chief Inspector of Dance Drama in the Department of Culture, Government of Bihar.

(vii) *Krishna Kumar Lal Das:* Born at Madhubani in Bihar, Krishna Kumar inherited his love and passion for music and dance from his father, Satya Narayan, who himself was a vocalist and even played the 'dholak' in the 'temple mandali'. At patna, Krishna Kumar became the main dancer singer of the 'bhajan mandali' at the Patan Devi Temple. As a child artiste he won gold medals in the local music and dance competitions held at Delhi, Karnal and other nearby areas. Even after a car accident in which he became seriously handicapped with one leg fitted with a Jaipur foot, he continued to learn and perform Kathak under the guidance of Guru Prof. Nagendra Prasad Mohini. In this phase of his life, he received great encouragement from Sitara Devi.

(viii) *Sheoji Mishra,* nephew of Pt. Jokhu Majaraj is the son of Badri Mishhra of Muzaffarpur who after receiving training from his cousin, Pt. Birju Maharaj at Delhi, is propagating the art of Kathak at Patna.

(ix) *Prof. Nagendra Prasad Mohini:* Origtinally from Pakistan, Nagendra Prasad comes from a family of artistes. His father was a traditional bhajan singer and *kathavachak*. Nagendra Prasad became the disciple of Nalin Ganguli in Kathak. Simultaneously, he also learnt ballet from Chandra Bhattacharjee, folk dances of Patna from Satdeo Sharma and the rudiments of Bharat Natyam. He has been living in Patna for over 35 years and is propagating the art of Kathak.

Deoghar

Deoghar is a well known religious site with over 22 temples located in the region mostly dedicated to Shiva. Legend has it that when Ravana was flying towards Lanka with the Shivalinga in his hands, contrary to the advice received from Shiva that the 'linga' be not placed on the ground, Ravana perforce had to place the 'linga' on the earth as he had to answer the call of nature. When he tried to lift it again, he was unable to do so and in his fury, he buried the 'linga' further. Till today, perhaps, this is the only 'linga' which remains buried. Thousands of devotees gather on the occasion of Shivaratri when the place resounds with the bhajans and

chants of the devout 'pandas' and the local populace. In this small time place, some old people did have vague and hazy recollections of a music and dance katha-vacan tradition but which seemingly has died a natural death as it is not evident today. However, even within these limited parameters, the names of the following Kathaks emerged.

(i) *Late Sitaram Maharaj,* whose forefathers belonged to a traditional *kathavachak* family. This family was related to the Kalka-Bindadin family of Hadia tehsil who had later settled at Lucknow. Guru Sitaram Maharaj was a disciple of Bindadin Maharaj. Living in Deoghar, he performed in the durbar and also left his imprint through his disciples, Bam Shankar Mishra and Bam Shankar Baliyase.

(ii) *Late Bam Shankar Mishra,* inherited the tradition of music and dance from his family. He was a disciple of Sitaram Maharaj.

(iii) *Bam Shankar Baliyase,* aged over 80 years, was always fascinated by Kathak. He learnt from Guru Sitaram Maharaj and also from Achhan Maharaj at Lucknow. Bestowed with an arresting personality in his youth, his dance demonstrated the beauty of 'ang' taught by his gurus. His performances at the All India Conference at Calcutta gave him acclaim. He also received patronage from the then Maharaja of Gidhaur. He even had the opportunity of working together with Shambhu Maharaj. He learnt the art of thumri singing and was associated with Chandrasekhar of Monghyr and Rajaji of Gaya. His performances were replete with 'bhav-nritya' and "abhinaya" to thumris where the aspect of 'bhav batana' gained importance. Today in his old age, he has given up dancing and is living with his sons on a farm in a remote village near Deoghar.

(iv) *Krishna Kesri* is a disciple of the late Bam Shankar Mishra. He also received some training from Lakhan Natraj. However, with his performances and teaching assignments, he was unable to suport his family and now along with his classes in Kathak, he runs a small grocery shop at Deoghar.

Bhagalpur

Formerly called Sultanganj, Bhagalpur lies south of the river Ganges.

Rock sculptures from the sixth century to the nineth century A.D. have been found at Patharghatta while Sultanganj is the site of a Gupta period temple. Some of the dancers associated with this region are as follows :

(i) *Kajjan Bai,* living in the latter part of the last century to the early part of this century, was known for her expositon of thumri abhinaya.

(ii) *Late Ghunghroo Maharaj* belonging to a traditional *katha vachak* family had formalised the rendering of dance which however still retained its rural flavour. He was stated to be related to the Hadia tehsil family of Mishras and was supposedly a cousin of Kalka-Bindadin Maharaj.

(iii) *Ram Naresh Mishra* related to the Mishra family of Muzaffarpur taught Kathak even though his forte lay in tabla.

(iv) *Pt. Sudama Goswami's* rendering of Kathak was in the tradition of dance drama. To quote some local sources—"while enacting a dance, he would turn his back to the audience for a brief second; When he turned his face again towards the audience—lo & behold! It was another character that he was portraying. These enactments were interspersed with tukras and parans".

Muzaffarpur

This region saw great patronage to music and dance by the local zamindars or wealthy noblemen. Evening musical soirees seemed to be a common feature amongst a certain section of the society. Because of the restrictions placed on women by society, the system of learning dance at home came into vogue.

(i) *Late Amanullah and Ataullah Khan 'bhand'.* Not much is known about their family history except a stray reference to the fact that they danced Kathak on special occasions.

(ii) *Late Patrabai,* a courtesan dancer who was reputed for her excellent exposition of 'thumris'.

(iii) *Late Ustad Fattan Khan* was a disciple of Achhan Maharaj. His brother, Shakarullah Khan was well known in the field of tabla.

(iv) *Late Pt. Bindeshwari Prasad Mishra* belonged to a *kathavachak* family from Azamgarh whose forefathers had migrated to Muzaffarpur. His rendering of Kathak was in the traditional *kathavachak* style.

(v) *Shyamlal Mishra alias Jokhu Maharaj* is the son of Sona Mishra. The family was related to the Mishra family of Hadia tehsil. Jokhu Maharaj was a disciple of Achhan Maharaj.

(vi) *Krishna Maharaj* was a disciple of Shambhu Maharaj.

(vii) *Ramchandra Maharaj* received training from both Jokhu Maharaj and Krishna Maharaj and therefore assimilated the best of the Achhan Maharaj and Shambhu Maharaj traditions.

(viii) *Nand Lal Mishra* is a Kathak residing at Meena gali, Chaturbhujsthan and teaching Kathak to all interested.

(ix) *Late K. Mitra* was a Kathak who had received his basic training in East Bengal. However, after partition he settled in Muzaffarpur where he taught Kathak.

Gaya

Situated near the Phalgu river, a tributary of the Ganges, Gaya lies near the junction of the Gangetic plain and the Chhota Nagpur plateau. There are 45 sacred places between Pretsil hill (north) and Bodh Gaya (south) with most of them being in Gaya itself. The principal temple is the Vishnu Shrine built by the Maratha princess, Ahilyabai in 1787. Others include the rocky temple covered hills of Ramsilla and Brahmajini, the latter identified with the Gayasirsa hill on which Buddha had preached.

(i) According to Umeshwar Deo Narayan Singh, retired advocate aged about 85 years, the early part of this century saw the "Saturday Club" perhaps the only of its kind which saw regular performances by the courtesan dancers. Some of the well known courtesans well versed in the Kathak idiom were "Chulbule wali Malka", Jaddan Bai, Chhoti Mallika, Rajeshwari, Dhela bai and Tulabai. However, this club closed around 1930 after which the town saw sporadic mehfils featuring courtesans.

(ii) *Lakhan Natraj:* Born at Gaya in 1921, Lakhanji became a disciple

of Shambhu Maharaj. Thereafter his performances in the Calcutta Conferences till 1955 and in Delhi's prestigious Sapru House won him wide acclaim. He even participated and contributed to India's freedom struggle by choreographing appropriate dance items suited to the times. For his contributions to dance, he was bestowed the title of "Natraj".

(iii) *K. Ramchandraji*, gurubhai of Anokhey Lal, was a disciple of Sukre Maharaj (probably Sukhdev Maharaj) at Benaras. He performed and taught not only in Gaya but also in Jhumri Talaiya.

(iv) *Kedar Nath 'Gayab'* was a disciple of Ramchandraji. Besides Kathak, he was also well versed in the arts of 'dholak' and 'tabla' which he learnt from Shri Tapeshwar Ojha.

(v) *Kodai Singh* and *Deenbandhu Kathak* were frequent visiting artistes in Gaya.

Lohardagga

This was the birth place of Dashrathji Kathak. Hailing from a family of musicians associated with the "Ras", Dashrathji was a disciple of Lallanji. He also learnt for sometime from Bhagwan Das and Pagal Baba.

Ranchi

Lying on the Subarnarekha river, and known as the summer capital of Bihar, little activity on the classical music and dance front was noticed in Ranchi. From Manju Malkani, a practitioner in Kathak, the names of Sharada Maharaj and Ganesh Mishra emerged. Steeped in the tradition of Kathak of the Benaras gharana, Sharada Maharaj spent his entire life at Ranchi. However, in his old age, he succumbed to paralysis and was moved to Benaras.

Ganesh Mishra, originally hailing from Samastipur comes from a traditional family of artistes. A contemporary of Sharada Maharaj, his daughter is carrying on the Kathak tradition.

Sonepur

Some of the families associated with the temple of Mahadeo Nath were practitioners of music and dance. One of the most well known artiste was Harihar Nath.

Naugachhia and Gidhaur

Representatives of the Jaipur gharana belonging to the Sridhar family made Naugachhia and Gidhaur their home for three generations. Predominent among them were Gopalji, Shankarlal, Shivlal, Pannalal, Lakshman Prasad, Badri Prasad and Kishanlal at Naugachhia and Mohanlal at Gidhaur.

Jharia

Jharia saw in Kamla bai, a courtesan dancer, an excellent exponent of 'thumri-abhinaya'.

Bettiah and Darbhanga

These places saw many artistes practising or teaching Kathak in the last two centuries. The interest of the Maharajas of Bettiah and the Maharajas of Darbhanga and the patronage given to the artistes have been discussed in the preceding chapter. However, among the dancers, representatives of the Benaras gharana come foremost to the mind such as Dularam, Biharilal, Puranlal and Hiralal. The other dancers who left their mark were Budhan Mishra, Darbari Das and Kameshwar Jha at Darbhanga.

Rampalji was a 'kathak' in the Darbhanga raj. His son, Jagdish Mohan Natraj carried on the family tradition of dance. He became a disciple of Ram Narain Mishra. The latter also hailing from Darbhanga was a disciple of Achhan Maharaj.

Visiting Kathak artistes and present day practitioners are many in number. In the early part of this century, the names of Kathaks who performed very often in Bihar or spent a number of years in Bihar were Pt. Shivlal, son of Ganeshilal of village Dharda, Rajasthan (district Sujangarh). Pt. Sheonarayan, son of Makhanlal of Village Modha, Kusumdesar, tehsil Rattangarh and Pt. Chiranjilal, son of Chhogaji (Chhagganlal) of village Kanwari, tehsil Sujangarh. As the number of persons from present day Bihar learning or practising Kathak are considerable, in order to avoid committing the mistake of omitting some, they have not been named individually. However, it would suffice to say that there exists a more positive atmosphere and attitude to dance today.

CHAPTER 7

Conclusion

The region of Bihar has contributed to the history of India not only politically, economically and socially but also culturally. Due to its strategic importance as the socio-politico-religious leader, it became the centre for music and dance. The system of 'nagar-badhus', especially in the pre-Christian era, was an indication to the highly developed form of dancing and the associated individual skill and artistry of the performers as well as the knowledge of the teachers. The Gupta period in the post-Christian era saw the golden period of Hunduism and the prevalence of temple building activities as well as the associated rituals involving music and dance, giving birth to the system of 'devadasis'. But this was short-lived due to the changes in the political scenario and the establishment of Muslim rule in India. Only the tradition of dance continued with the story-telling priests and the male gurus who were mostly Brahmins by faith.

As to the form of dance practised by the dancers of the region, a study of the poses and stances seen in the sculptures of the dancers and the 'yaksha-yakshinis' of the belt belonging to the period ranging from third century BC to about the eleventh century AD and those adopted by the dancers in the paintings of later period showed a continuity in form and stance which compared very well with the dance form Kathak as we know today. The basic positions of the dancers were in the near vertical poses with exaggerated 'tribhangis' and 'ardhamandalis' being extremely far and few. A living and pulsating tradition of dance in the region led to the writing of various books on music and dance. Most notable amongst

them is the treatise on hand gestures, *Sri Hastamuktavali*, authored by Shubhankar of Mithila. Many of the applications given in this treatise has a direct bearing on the popular usage of the hand gestures within Kathak. A study of the costume also revealed the knowledge of sewn clothes and the adoption of the costume comprising of a frock and long tight pants in ancient India, even going as far back as third century BC.

Women and male dancers dotted the scenario as is evident from the mention of various dancers such as Amrapali, Salvati, Padmavati, Vimla, Roopkosha, Upghosha and others in the various Buddhist and Jain canons as well as the writings of Chinese, Greek and British travellers. Special mention must be made of Buchanan's survey wherein many names of Kathaks are to be found. These surveys and personal efforts of interviewing people have led to tracing some hereditary Kathak families in the region as also various practitioners in the last two centuries and names of rulers and zamindars who were not only great patrons but were also artistes of high order.

Today, there exists a more positive atmosphere in Bihar especially towards dance.

Geneological Table of Patna Painters

Table I

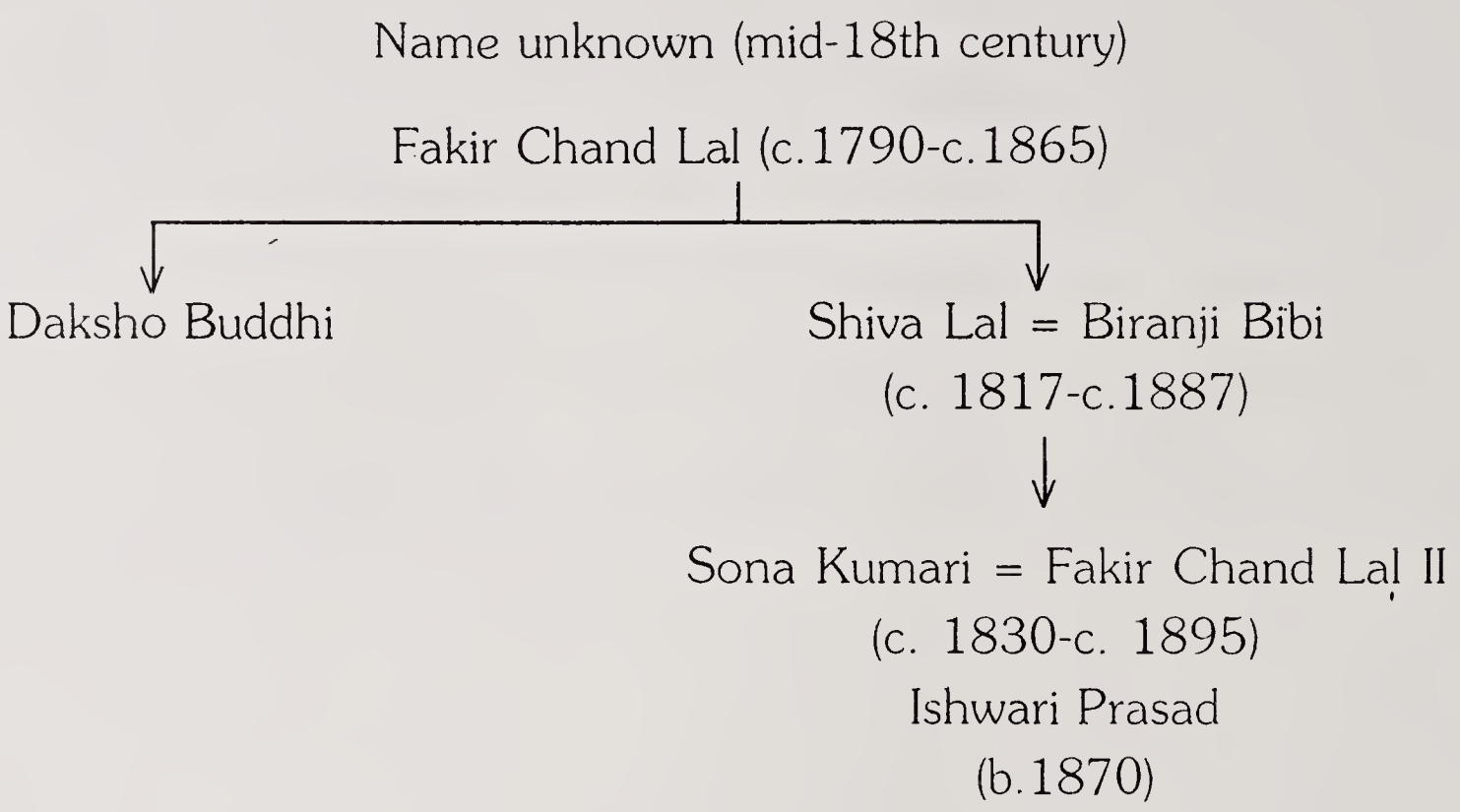


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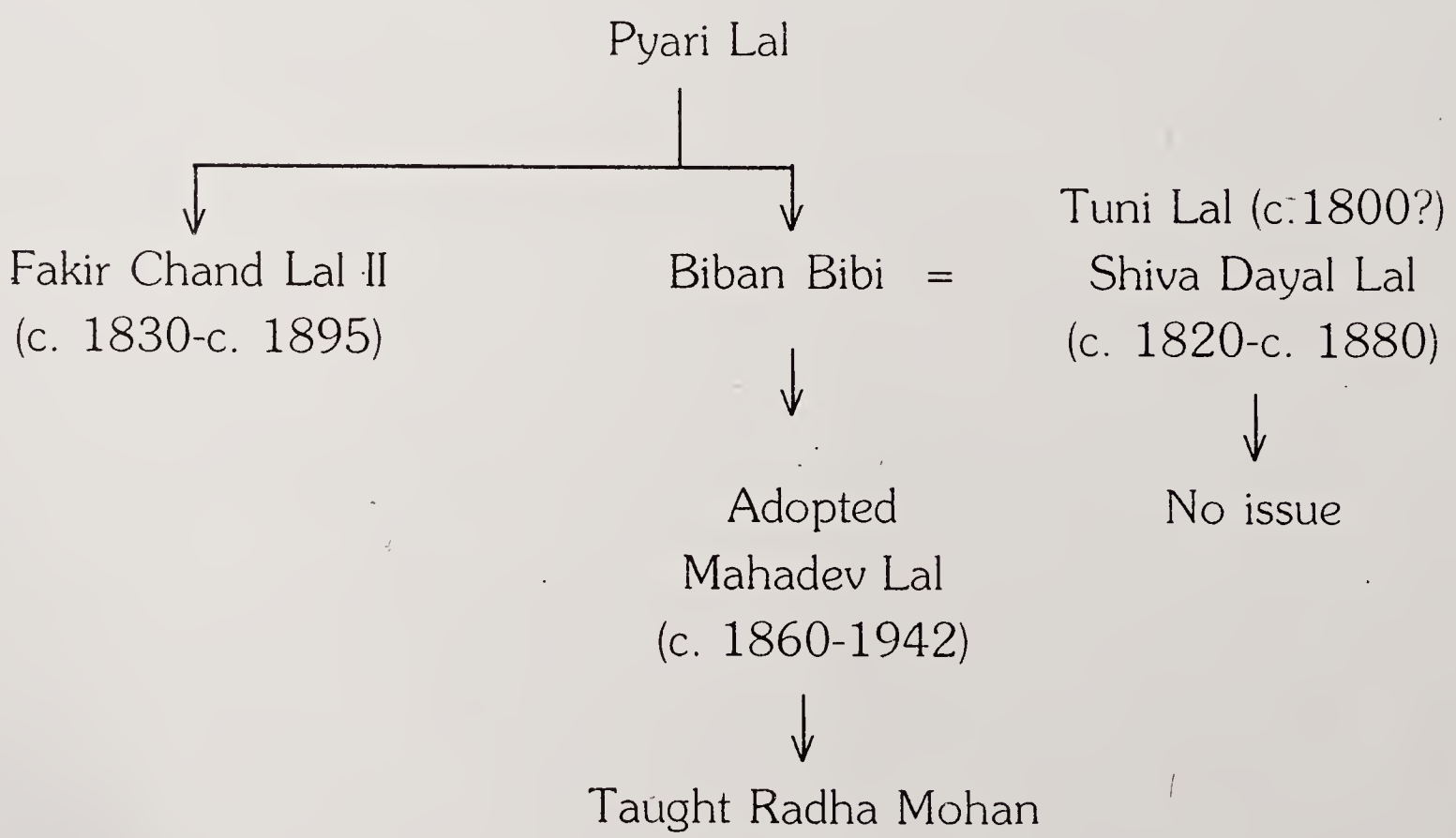


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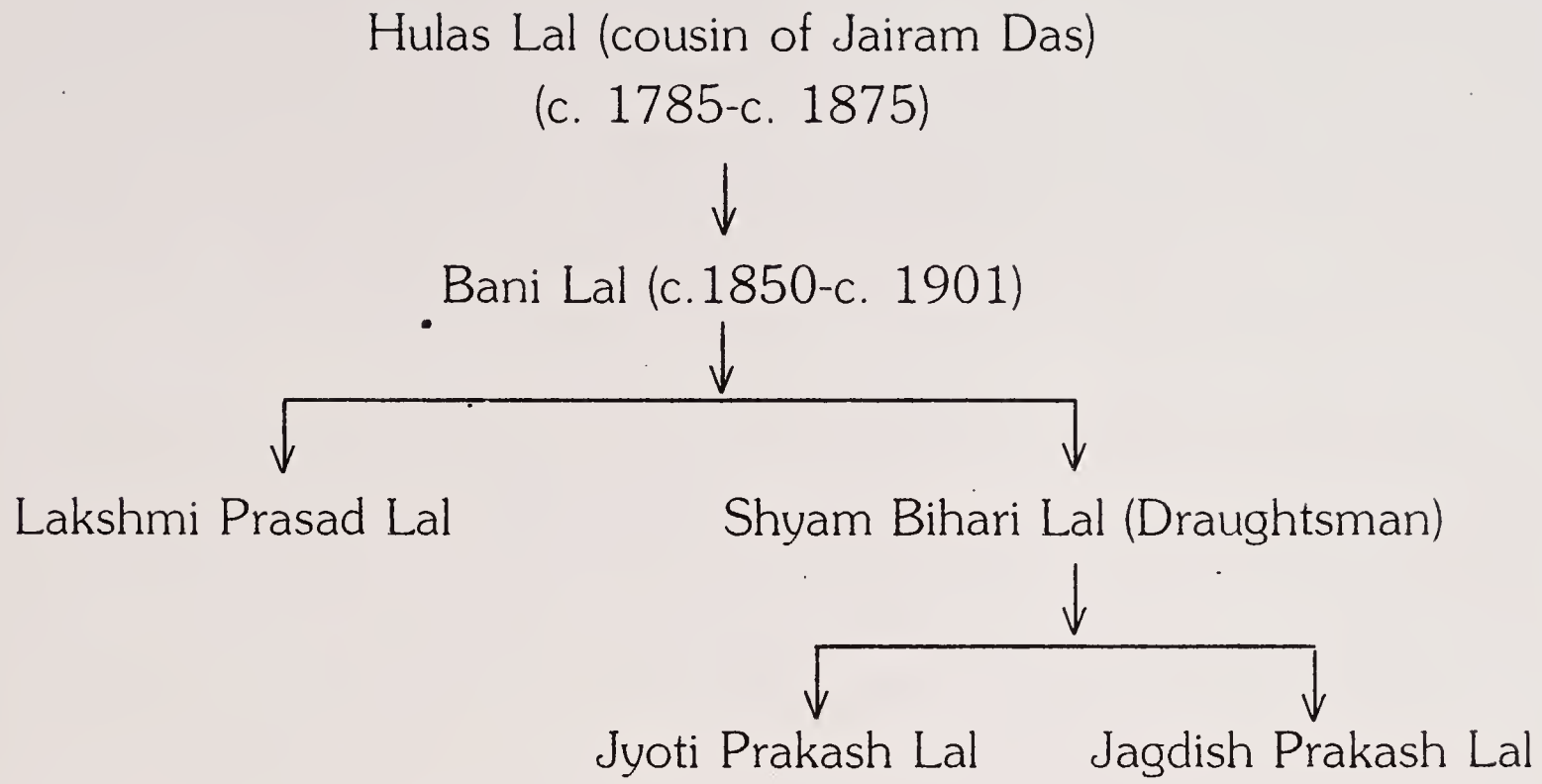
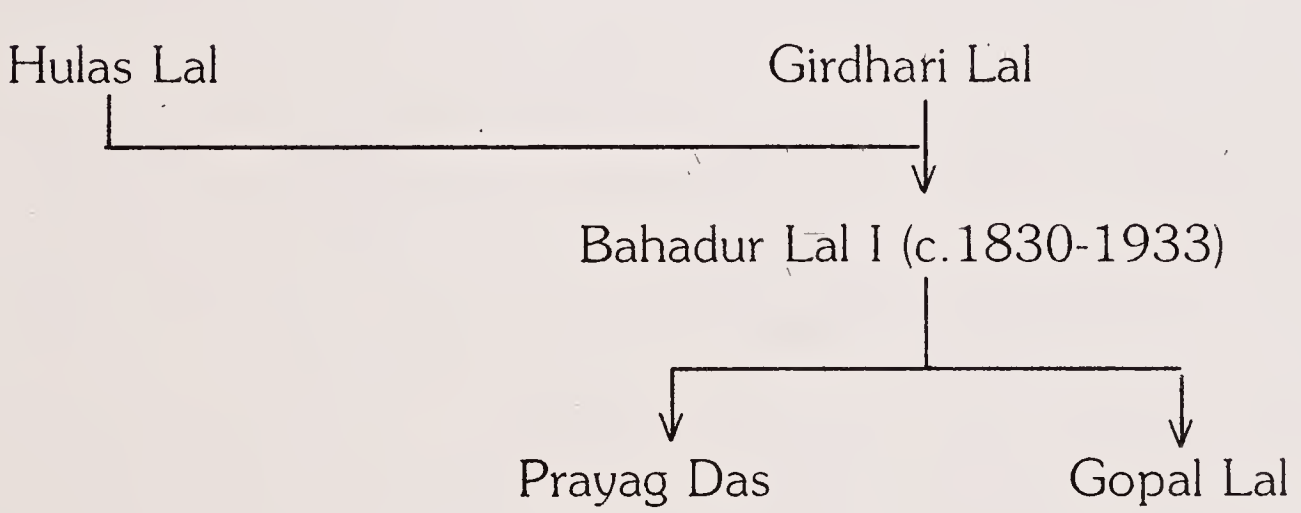


Table IV



An attempt has been made in this book to trace the development of classical dance in Bihar from the Mauryan and Gupta periods, known for patronage to fine arts, learning, administration and polity right up to the present age. It provides a detailed study on the dance scenario, hand gestures, postures and costumes utilised by the dancers of the area. It also, for the first time, documents the list of patrons and prominent artistes in the last 150 years.

"Padmashri" Shovana Narayan—the author of this book and Kathak dance virtuoso has added new dimensions to Kathak through innovative use of contemporary themes, poetry and philosophical works. She has pioneered a unique experiment bringing together three diverse dance styles, namely, the Spanish Flamenco, the European Classical Ballet and the Indian Kathak.

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